



INTERNET ARTICLE

Embalenhle community reminded of the importance of clean hands and water conservation

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The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) Mpumalanga Provincial Operations in partnership with Govan Mbeki Local Municipality reminded the community of Embalenhle in Secunda of the importance of regular and proper handwashing as the best defence of disease prevention and the urgent need to practice water conservation during an awareness event in celebration of Global Handwashing Day at the Khotso Community Hall on 06 November 2024.

Dudu Sifunda, the Head of Provincial Operations for DWS in Mpumalanga, addressed the gathering and explained the significance of the annual Global Handwashing Day.

“Global Handwashing Day is celebrated worldwide on 15 October each year,” she said. “The theme for this year is ***‘Why are clean hands still important?’*** Clean hands remain one of the most effective defences against the spread of infectious diseases, including waterborne illnesses like cholera, which can be prevented through proper handwashing.”

Sifunda highlighted that handwashing with soap and water is essential to prevent the transmission of harmful bacteria and viruses. “In many communities, improper hygiene and lack of access to clean water contribute to the spread of illness,” she said. “We must wash our hands regularly, especially after using the toilet, before eating, and after handling food. This is an easy, effective practice to protect our health.”

She emphasised the interconnectedness of hand hygiene and water conservation. “As we demonstrate proper handwashing today, we also remind everyone that water is a precious resource. It is essential to use water wisely and responsibly. Every drop counts, and while we must wash our hands to stay healthy, we must also make every effort to conserve water for future generations.”

The event included an educational performance by learners from Basizeni Special School, Mbalenhle, and Shapeve Primary Schools. The children sang songs and highlighted the importance of both handwashing and water conservation. Learners from Shapeve Primary also led a demonstration on the proper steps for effective handwashing.

Stakeholders such as traditional leaders, the Pastors’ Forum, and Evander Gold Mine pledged their support for the awareness campaign and committed to spreading the message of hand hygiene and water conservation throughout their communities and institutions. Ndabezitha Mabhena, representing traditional leaders, welcomed the initiative, expressing

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hope that similar programmes would be held regularly to reinforce the importance of hygiene among children and families.

Pastor Khumalo, speaking on behalf of the Pastors' Forum, affirmed their commitment to spreading the message within local congregations and communities.

Mr Ephraim Myeni from Evander Gold Mine reiterated the importance of proper handwashing and also reminded the importance of water conservation and resource protection in the midst of climate change. "We really need to use water wisely and sparingly looking at the climate change. Let us conserve water and make sure that our waste does not end up in our water resources as it makes it very expensive for the water service providers to clean that water".

Acting Executive Mayor of Govan Mbeki, Cllr Thandi Ngxonono, concluded the event by emphasising the essential link between hand hygiene and water usage. "Water is life," she reminded the audience.

"While handwashing is vital, we must also use water responsibly. We have to make sure we wash our hands with running water and soap, but at the same time, we must conserve this valuable resource. Let us remember that water is scarce, and every drop counts. We must save water wherever we can and make sure to teach our children and communities about water conservation."

Cllr Ngxonono's remarks resonated with the young participants, who demonstrated an impressive awareness of the importance of conserving water despite its limited availability. "The kids have stated that water is scarce, they are aware that water is scarce. As scarce as it is but it is important, water is life. As water is scarce, we are asking you the community of Govan Mbeki to use water wisely and conserve as much as possible", she said

"Water is not something to take for granted", she added. "It is expensive, and it's vital for our survival. Let us work together to protect and preserve water, and spread the message of water conservation throughout our communities."

In conclusion, the acting Executive Mayor informed the community about water and sanitation projects underway in the municipality and encouraged them to safeguard the infrastructure against theft and vandalism.

The event underscored the importance of handwashing as a first line of defence against disease while reinforcing the shared responsibility to conserve water, ensuring a healthy and sustainable future for all.

Themba Khoza

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