



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### OPINION *PIECE*

#### **Has the Blue or Green Drop status truly aided in the delivery of safe drinking water?**

12 February 2015

*The provision of safe and reliable water should be the cornerstone of municipal services.*

*Water of good quality is necessary for domestic, environmental, industrial, recreational and agricultural uses. Attaining to the Blue Drop and Green Drop status it should be the objective of any municipality or water board. You need to obtain full knowledge of the legislative requirements, attain optimum operational and water quality compliance performance, including carrying out water management strategies involved in complying with the relevant standards.*

*The Blue/Green drop status is an initiative launched during 2008, by the Department of Water Affairs. It is a certification programme administered to improve water quality provided by water and local authorities in South Africa.*

*The system aims at awarding water and local authority water providers and services with Blue and/or Green Drop Status if they comply with drinking water and wastewater legislation. This incentive-driven regulatory approach is a first in South Africa, and is internationally regarded as unique in the water regulatory domain.*

*The Blue Drop Certification Programme aims to see that local government organs achieve what has become popularly known as the Blue Drop Status. The status is indicative that the drinking water supplied is of excellent quality and safe for human consumption. The Department of Water Affairs annually publish the ratings and it was noted that no local authority in KwaZulu-Natal was rated among the top ten in South Africa and at least one major local authority providing water was zero rated. The City of Johannesburg received the number one rating in the country for the quality of the water supplied to its communities.*

*A Green Drop Status awarded by the DWS to local authorities is indicative of compliance with good wastewater discharge standards for 90% of the time for the following criteria: Operational Staff; Wastewater Quality Monitoring; Wastewater Sample Analysis; Submission of Wastewater Quality Results; Wastewater Quality Compliance; Management of Wastewater Quality Failures; Storm-water Management; Bylaws; Wastewater Treatment Capacity; Publication of Wastewater Quality Performance including Wastewater Asset Management.*

*It is very important to note that the 2012 Blue Drop Report showed significant improvements since the process was introduced in 2009. This served as evidence of the positive impact this incentive-based regulation approach is having on the South African water sector.*

*The first Blue Drop Report in 2009 indicated that the national microbiological compliance for South African tap water was measured at 93.3% against the National Standard (SANS 241). Notably this has increased to 97.3% in the 2012 reporting cycle. Overall, municipalities are taking their Blue Drop status seriously, with Ekurhuleni and City of Johannesburg dominating the charts, followed closely by eThekweni and the City of Cape Town.*



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*On the other hand, the Green Drop certification programme for wastewater is an initiative to ensure that these treatment works progressively improve their operations, so as not to impact negatively on the water bodies into which they discharge their product. The proposed system aims at awarding water services authorities with Green Drop Status if they comply with wastewater legislation and other best practices required by the Department of Water Affairs. This incentive-based regulatory approach is a first for South Africa, and is internationally regarded as unique in the water regulatory domain.*

*As a supplier/consultant to these municipal water utilities, what do Blue/Green Drop accreditations mean to you? What are your thoughts on the judging and awards process? Are the qualifying criteria fair to all parties or has the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) set unrealistic targets for municipalities?*

*Has Blue Drop status truly aided in the delivery of safe drinking water? How have your products and services contributed to the overall improvement of water and wastewater quality in South Africa?*

*In 2008, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) realised that many municipalities do not manage, maintain and operate their wastewater systems in compliance with legislation posing an apparent risk to human health and safe environment.*

*A set of criteria was developed to collectively assess the entire wastewater system within each municipality including its ability to provide acceptable service to its community. This set of criteria is called the Green Drop Certification programme.*

*Only 20% of global wastewater is currently being treated, leaving low-income countries hardest hit by contaminated water supplies and disease.*

*This is according to a United Nations (UN) report which encourages governments to see treated wastewater as a valuable resource, and a priority for the post-2015 development agenda.*

*The number of municipalities participating in the Green Drop assessments has steadily increased since 2009. In this regard, 152 municipalities participated in the 2013 Green Drop assessments, compared to 98 municipalities assessed in 2009 an increase of 55%.*

*Similarly, the number of wastewater systems assessed in 2009 has also increased from 444 to almost 1000 wastewater systems in 2013, representing a 56% increase over 5 years.*

*In this regard, 100% of municipalities have responded positively to the Green Drop challenge and showed up for audits every year, with more and more municipal systems having managed to achieve higher scores each year, despite the stringent nature of the Green Drop Certification criteria.*

*The assessment data from the green drop system also suggests that municipal performance in wastewater management has significantly improved steadily over time. Today, there are more good performers than in 2009 and 2011.*

*In 2013, more than 90% of municipalities had design details, drawings and a clear knowledge of their systems as well as ability to make informed decisions compared to less than 20% in 2009, with majority of municipalities measuring various types of flows as well as showing flow meter calibration certificates to verify credibility of their flow information.*



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*Progress in small and rural towns across South Africa has also been observed with performance improving up to 70 % and 75 % for Tsantsabane and Kgatelopele local municipalities - North West - respectively.*

*The Progress Assessment Tool for the 2014 Green Drop process started in September 2013, with municipalities expected to respond by December 2013.*

*While the criteria for the Green Drop process was not changed the audit period ran from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013. The scorecards were pre-populated by the Department, with the onus on the participating municipalities to confirm the correctness of the information provided. Thus, these, Green Drop assessment for 2014 were not made public.*

*Efforts to focus on the 2014 Green Drop Report process were however largely overshadowed by the announcement that the 2012 Green Drop Results were not released as expected during the Awards Dinner on Wednesday, 10 July 2013.*

*The 2015 processes regarding the matter are yet to be kick-started.*

*But, generally, the risk based approach, through the use of the Wastewater Risk Abatement Plan (W<sub>2</sub>RAP) Guideline has played a significant role in enabling municipalities to identify their critical risks by planning in advance and motivate successfully for budgets and other resources to their respective Councils to address the identified risks.*

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