



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

New Councilors to be inducted in water and sanitation issues

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Officials of the Department of Water and Sanitation are preparing themselves to induct new Councilors to water and sanitation issues they need to deal with for the next five years as part of their mandate.

The run-up to the elections saw a sharp rise in community protests, most of which had to do with the political climate rather than service delivery; yet water and sanitation issues were at the heart of these protests.

Ironically, elections came in the middle of a debilitating drought experienced by major parts of the country. The department has spent millions in a bid to obviate the consequences of the drought.

The Councilors will have to lay their hands on Minister Nomvula Mokonyane's Budget Vote speech in which she said that her department has put various interventions to mitigate the effects of the drought. Among these are Water Conservation and Water Demand Management efforts through War on Leaks, surface water resource management (optimized operation of the Vaal River System), groundwater resource management (drilling and equipping of boreholes), carting of water through a fleet of motorized tankers, provision of static storage tanks and storage reservoirs, water transfers as in emergency transfers from Tugela to Goedetrouw, and Othongathi River transfer to Hazelmere.

The new politicians will have to understand that these and other measures are intended to ensure that the country is also climate change resilient, which would reduce the risk for future drought mitigation.

The measures employed include:

- Domestic rain water harvesting (drinking water, water for livestock; water for irrigation);
- Integrating groundwater and surface water use in the future;
- Desalination at a large scale;
- Invest in innovative solutions such as Drop the Block, a water saving mechanism which was designed by Prasheen Dokie, a young chemical engineer from KZN;
- Incorporate all municipal and privately owned dams into the management system for the future;
- Implement further transfer schemes to improve drought resilience,
- Build additional storage capacity;
- Roll out large scale re-use of water (effluent recycling, focus on coastal towns where treated effluent is disposed of via sea outfalls and not taken into account in return flows).

The drought has exacerbated water scarcity and has placed food production and water supplies under threat.



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In response to the aforementioned challenges, the South African government has established an Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Service Delivery, with representation from different sectors.

Within the water sector, in order to mitigate the drought effects, dam operating rules have been applied to 35 dams and 4 systems where restrictions are currently applied with regard to the water resource.

At the heart of the delivery of water, however, is the concept of saving water as best we can. This is based on the premise that South Africa is a water scarce country and is among the 30 driest countries in the world that run the risk of becoming a desert in 40 years or so if we don't start embracing the notion of water conservation.

However, the positive response by South Africans to messages and programmes of conserving water is encouraging. The response by the youth to enroll for training with DWS as water agents, artisans and plumbers as part of the War on Leaks is phenomenal. War on Leaks is the department's programme to train 15 000 youths as water agents, artisans and plumbers who will be absorbed by municipalities to help fix leaking taps and burst pipes in their own areas and also advocate for water conservation. This programme resulted from the department realising that it is losing R7 billion a year to non-revenue (unaccounted for) water.

Further to this, last month the department introduced the Clear Rivers Campaign as part of its celebrations of Mandela Month.

The call to clean the rivers was embraced with unprecedented enthusiasm by thousands of South Africans who cherish water as an important source of socio-economic development. The debut campaign became a phenomenal success.

According to the UN's Programming, Planning and Monitoring Director, Ebenezer Ampa Sarpong, approximately 14 000 people die everyday after drinking polluted water in developing countries.

A 2004 study by the Population Resource Centre found that 2.2 million infants and children die each year from diarrhoea caused largely by contaminated water and food. According to the study estimates, polluted water in Africa and India causes 1.4 million deaths each year as a result of diarrhoeal diseases such as cholera and dysentery.

It is against this background that we must keep our rivers clean at all times. It is even more important that we clean them for the sake of posterity. Calls for the environment to be introduced as a subject in schools can no longer be ignored. I believe that empowering young minds will be a good investment in the future of South Africa's environment.

The drop-the-block campaign, which is about putting brick-sized rubber blocks in cisterns to minimize water wastage during flushing, will be something new for the incoming politicians. No fewer than 200 000 blocks have been distributed in various parts of the country, more so in KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Gauteng and Western Cape. Hundreds of volunteers have participated in the campaign by going door-to-door to distribute the blocks.

According to Jabu Mtolo, the coordinator of the distribution, the demand for the blocks in major parts of the country is phenomenal.



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New Councillors also have a tough task of familiarizing themselves with the Blue Drop and Green Drop programmes used by DWS to monitor and assess municipalities in their management of drinking water and waste water treatment. Past performance of municipalities in these programmes has depended largely on municipalities' financial stability and their revenue collection.

Whatever the outcome of the assessments of the two programmes, there's one lesson Councillors have to learn; that South Africa's water from the tap is safe to drink.

By Themba Khumalo