



OPINION PIECE

It is a criminal offence to vandalise water infrastructure

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Vandalism of infrastructure is a criminal offence. The criminal element in our society that perpetuates this will destroy us if we don't act now. This government is for the people by the people and we should stand up against vandalism and its perpetrators.

Last year, President Jacob Zuma has, in terms of section 84 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, signed into law the Criminal Matters Amendment Act, 2015. The Act amends the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 and it has introduced harsher sentences for the destruction of essential infrastructure, as well as more stringent bail conditions and applications for perpetrators. Any person found guilty of any infrastructure related offences can be convicted for a period of imprisonment leading up to 30 years.

This includes any offence involving ferrous or non-ferrous metals which form part of an installation, structure, facility or system, whether publicly or privately owned, which is used to provide or distribute an essential service in relation to water, sewerage, energy or transport for the benefit of the public. Theft of copper cables, transformers, engines and taps is a crime because the supply system, reticulation and its delivery points are affected and major water leakages are possible or even experienced.

Perpetrators include alleged contractors or individuals who sabotage water infrastructure so as to supply water tankers for their benefit, whilst charging communities for the same free water! Those throwing foreign objects into sewer systems resulting in sewer blockages and spillages, damage to pump-stations and pipework will be dealt with. The water business is energy intensive and highly dependent on electricity. Cable theft therefore poses a high risk regarding security of water supply.

Elements of criminality are all over the country but stealing copper and cables has become a way of life. It has to stop. This year alone, cases of vandalism have escalated and municipalities are rapidly increasing their security.

All infrastructure related offences should be reported to the police, local municipality or through the department's toll free number 0800 200 200 to report them.

The Department of Water and Sanitation in the North West Province has established a water services monitoring tool which keeps an eye on all water supply, water quality, spillages and protests related to water service delivery as well as challenges of infrastructure in all eleven Water Service Authorities in the North West Province. This means the community; the police, municipalities, water boards and all water consumers will be watching all perpetrators, so they must watch out.

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