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INTERNET ARTICLE

Quality water resource management – Lesson learned

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When it comes to water, it is widely accepted that business as usual is no longer an option.

One African retailer is leading by example and actively working to save water by drastically reducing the amount of water it consumes – in its own operations and those of its suppliers.

Now it is applying the lessons learnt in South Africa across its African store operations.

Woolworths began its water resource management journey by engaging experts to measure how much water it uses, says Justin Smith, Woolworths Head of Sustainability.

Since then, the retailer has changed the way it approaches real estate across the continent.

Before it opens a new store, office or distribution centre it looks at the design of the property to make sure it uses water efficiently.

Its stores now include features such as water-saving air-conditioning, kitchens and rest-room facilities. Selected properties collect rainwater. Others recycle it.

The move to sophisticated water monitoring, revealed a surprising amount of water lost through an extensive matrix of leaks, hidden from view, beneath its stores. “At one store in Cape Town, Woolworths discovered leaks, which resulted in the loss of 2.5-millions of litres of water a month – that’s as much as an Olympic size swimming pool of municipal water lost a month,” explains Smith.

The retailer now works with property developers and landlords, across the continent to repair leaks and improve water billing.



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By the end of 2015, these measures will see relative water use in Woolworths stores cut in half, from a 2007 benchmark.

Smith says Woolworths is also educating its supply chain and providing valuable water-saving tips to customers and employees.

The retailer also regularly measures the amount of water used by selected suppliers and works with them to conserve and improve waste water management during the growing, production and manufacturing processes.

The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and the United Nations are among some of the other partners Woolworths is also working with to drive water conservation.

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