



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

Government plans are in place towards water security

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In October 2014 water cut offs in Ekurhuleni, parts of the West Rand, Johannesburg and later Pretoria resulted in people asking about water security for the country.

Resulting from residents' enquiries through radio stations and media broadly, the need to communicate what the issue was became imperative. Rand Water and the municipality officials of the affected municipalities were invited to respond and the indication was that this was a result the theft of electrical cables needed for pumping water to and at the reservoirs. The electrical power cuts affected the turbines which are critical for the pumping of water.

It was important to communicate what the actual issues were that were affecting water availability. According to certain sections of the media the economic hub of the country was on the throes of a catastrophe. Genuine efforts to find the root cause of the problem were replaced by a fine line bordering sensationalism.

The most criticism was directed at the manner with which local municipalities handled the situation. There should have been better ways of informing residents timeously of what was happening, providing accurate information, communicating efficiently and providing contingency measures such as water tanks. Most critics raised the following concerns: chronic wastage of water, the way municipalities are run, failing water infrastructure and a lack of effort towards efficient water use.

There was also a concern around the 37% of our clean, drinkable water being lost through leaking pipes, dripping taps and other inefficient ways of using water. A study by the University of Stellenbosch on behalf of the Water Research Commission indicated this. What the pundits failed to mention is the fact that water challenges are a result of a young nation grappling with societal changes from a scenario where only a few had first world standards, while being without water was a norm for the rest of the citizens. In the past, water boards could comfortably supply clean, quality water to a few. Now the impact of urbanisation means that the population of Gauteng has grown a few times to also include more informal settlements such as Orange Farm, Mandela Park, Diepsloot, etc.

Besides water quantity and supply critics also highlight water quality issues, often mentioning the risk of a disease outbreak. DWS has a benchmark at international standards pertaining to water quality – e.g. the Blue drop certification programme, a watchdog that monitors the quality of water. However, more needs to be done, especially with those municipalities that do not meet stipulated minimum requirements.

According to Rand Water, the theft of infrastructure, the maintenance of facilities, a new water plan and the protection of electrical power supply to the pumping station are matters needed to be looked into to avoid water supply challenges in the future.

Thabang Molai

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For more information contact Sputnik Ratau, Director Media Liaison, DWS, at 082 874 2942

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