



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

There is no substitute for water

10 March 2015

Ensuring the constant supply of clean drinking water for a growing South African population is becoming more and more challenging. It is a fact that South Africa is one of the driest countries in the world. The current irregular rainfall patterns lead to some areas experiencing extended periods of drought conditions and thus affected water supply, food production, livestock etc. This makes the situation even trickier for the Department of Water and Sanitation, whose mandate is to ensure that all South Africans have access to clean water and dignified sanitation.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that by the year 2025 about two thirds of the world's population could be experiencing water shortages, especially those living in the drier parts of the world. Therefore, South Africa needs to act responsibly so as to continue enjoying access to water.

There are three particular areas which pose a major threat to our efforts to ensure a constant supply of clean drinking water. These are pollution, lack of adequate infrastructure and water losses. The latter necessitates primarily for a change in behaviour.

Statistics show that in South Africa water leaks cost an estimated R7 billion annually. As part of efforts to overcome this challenge, the Department of Water and Sanitation will over the next three years train 15 000 artisan or plumbers, who will repair leaking taps and water pipes in their local municipalities. This training will be executed by the Rand Water Academy.

Significant water losses occur in our homes. We are well aware of practices such as someone opening the tap to flush away a leftover grain of rice from the sink, wasting perhaps half a litre of water instead of merely picking up that grain of rice and throwing it in the rubbish bin. We also know of the times one would brush their teeth over a running tap instead of pouring water into a cup to rinse after brushing.

There are other issues to correct – to immediately fix a leaking tap, not watering the lawn when the sun is at its highest, taking shorter showers and so on. There are countless such behavioural changes that could save thousands of litres of water if we only change the way we view water. As a country there needs to be a change from taking this life giving resource for granted.

Water that is unaccounted for amounts to millions of rand in lost revenue, money that could have been used towards extending water supply to the less fortunate communities or infrastructure development amongst others.

Pollution from different activities poses an enormous threat to our country's water resources. The biggest culprits include mines, industries, the agricultural sector, municipal waste water systems and members of the public at large.

Water quality in our rivers and dams is often compromised when waste from leaking sewage treatment works enters these water sources. DWS Enforcement Unit accompanied by the police recently laid criminal charges against Mr Chris Le Roux, owner of an abattoir, for polluting the Vaal River by dumping animal carcasses and fat remnants next to the Vaal



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River. Le Roux violated the National Water Act which precludes anyone from dumping waste within the perimeters of a river. Le Roux is also facing charges of violating the water act by operating his business without a water use licence.

Some within our country were critical of the recent arrival of a team of water engineers from Cuba. It is a known fact that South Africa does not have an adequate supply of engineers. Many of the engineers in the Department of Water and Sanitation are a nearing retirement age while others have already retired. In addition to this, due to better paying opportunities in the private sector young engineers are not keen to join government.

Instead of folding its arms the department therefore engaged in this partnership to ensure skills transfer among others. The department has worked with Cuban engineers in the past, an arrangement which has indeed led to the transfer skills.

*Finally, the Department of Water and Sanitation will celebrate National Water Week from 16 - 22 March 2015, under the theme “**water has no substitute**”. The week long programme will seek to further emphasise the importance of water as a driver of our economy. In addition, the intention is to create awareness on water scarcity and to encourage the very critical issue of behavioural change in relation to how we use water. The need to continue to conserve and protect our water resources is key to our survival. Water is life and cannot be substituted.*

Alice Simelane

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For more information contact: DWS Media Liaison Director Sputnik Ratau on 082 874 2942.

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