

## Water and Sanitation in the News

### **Save water there is no substitute**

Ironically, it has taken a drought to make South Africans more aware of our precious water resources. But, as with the big droughts of the past, the message remains the same: save water because water has no substitute.

### **The National Water Week runs from 14-22 March under the theme “Water for People, Water by People”.**

During this week, South Africans are urged to be mindful of people who still do not have access to this basic service and collectively pledge to save water in households, institutions of learning and industries. “There can be few South Africans who are unaware that the country is currently in the grip of the worst drought in decades,” said Margaret-Ann Diedricks, Director General: Department of Water and Sanitation.

The drought is also threatening the economy, with billions of rand lost in the maize and sugar cane sectors alone. Government is working hard to mitigate the impact. The Department of Water and Sanitation, together with team South Africa, is working hard to provide short-term water needs. According to Diedricks, groundwater is one of South Africa’s most under-utilised resources. “Water experts estimate we have tapped only half of what is available. The department has adopted a more scientific approach to the location of boreholes, taking into account the local geology as well as estimated yield of this underground water source to ensure money is not wasted.” News reports referring to the recent “borehole business boom” underscore these efforts.

Another initiative promoted by the department is recycled water. “While this is happening already in some areas, the use of recycled water is set to increase greatly over the next few years. Once viewed with revulsion, many South Africans are now starting to realise that recycled water is better than no water at all. In effect, there is no other option but to recycle. “One bit of good news is that the El Nino phenomenon - responsible for below-average rainfall and blistering heat across large parts of both South and Southern Africa - appears to have peaked. “Climate experts now believe it will be over by June or July this year, notwithstanding the persisting above-average temperatures and below-average rainfall.”

Attempts to mitigate the impact of the drought and conserve water cannot be the work of the department alone. Community involvement is essential. South Africans need to become actively involved in conserving and using water sparingly, complying with whatever restrictions are in force, and reporting and fixing leaks.

### **Context**

The vital importance of water was underscored this week as taps ran dry in some 40 areas in Johannesburg - coinciding with the launch of the ongoing National Water Week. As Minister of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane, was flagging off the exercise in Port Elizabeth, thousands of kilometers away, scores of Johannesburg residents were reeling under the shortage of the precious liquid. According to City Power officials, the problem emanated from Rand Water linking a new pipe to the existing infrastructure over the weekend, which meant disrupting the feed to the Yeoville reservoir. The facility carries 40 million litres per day. An operation that was supposed to have lasted 24 hours from 06h00 on Sunday was beset by complications hence it took longer than expected and the reservoir ran dry.

Among the affected areas were Berea, Bertams, Bez Valley, Braamfontein, Bruma, Cyrildene, Doornfontein, Hillbrow, Kensington, Malvern, Observatory, Troyeville, Parktown and Yeoville. These communities were left resembling villages as residents could be seen moving bucket in hand to secure water from neighbouring and tanks the water utility had placed in some areas...

Sources: [News24, 17 March 2016](#); [AllAfrica, 16 March 2016](#)

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