

Water and Sanitation in the News

Water-use strategy critical for South Africa's commercial premises

As South Africa braces for an unparalleled water crisis, commercial property owners and developers need to implement detailed management plans and strategies to optimize water use in their buildings. The water crisis in South Africa has worsened, prompting Gauteng's cities to impose water restrictions. Some other places have run out of water supply and residents there have to be supplied with water by water tanks. Meanwhile the Department of Water and Sanitation was expected on Wednesday to brief the portfolio committee in Parliament about the status of the drought in South Africa. This comes as the country faces a burgeoning water crisis that has depleted many municipalities and the agriculture sector since last year.

Water savings opportunities

Commercial buildings are made up of many systems that rely on water. ...One of the best ways to identify suitable water conservation measures is to establish a water savings plan to create a benchmark with which to rate and prioritize them. However, before we can determine and incorporate a water savings plan, we must first look at where water is used within a building. ...Determining the applications that have the greatest water consumption is critical to prioritize the overall goals and budget. Once the systems have been determined, a water savings plan can be developed. Grey water, rainwater harvesting, pressure reduction, insulate piping, leak proofing/leak repair and rain sensor on irrigation are options available with high capital investment; But they often pay back the investment when used often.

Source: [SA Commercial Prop News, 11 November 2015](#)

Context

All sectors of the economy, from agricultural to mining, health and property industries are scouring to find effective strategies to implement that would conserve water and lessen the effects of the current nation-wide drought. Meanwhile, Minister of Water Affairs Nomvula Mokonyane was not present to hear the outrage about South Africa's drought and water crisis at a heated committee meeting in parliament on Wednesday. This left Debra Mochotlhi, deputy director general for water planning and information management to say what everybody already knew: Six provinces were "affected by the drought" - Limpopo, KwaZulu, Natal-Mpumalanga, Free State, Northern Cape, North

West; Three had been declared disaster zones - KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Limpopo; Water is a naturally scarce resource in a country already sharing four major river systems with six neighbours; Taps are running dry and the country faces a problem; Gauteng is hot and people are using a lot of water there. Opposition parties expressed their anger, saying "This department has failed South Africa." DA MP Leon Basson said battling municipalities had not received the help they needed to cope with the shortage, citing the example of Madibeng which was under administration and had been only allocated R176 million.

South Africa is an arid country. It receives an average of 450mm of rainfall each year, half the world average. In the past, droughts, though they hurt, were overcome through engineering on a heroic scale applied to a population smaller than that of today. This time around, however, entire provinces are in crisis because a skills shortage and lack of political continuity has left the country responding to the disaster with calls for prayer. No amount of clever politics or good administration could have averted the drought, just about everyone agrees, but the effect of it could have been softened. Instead, it has been intensified.

According to a recent Mail& Guardian article, three officials working for the water department confirm that, although there were long-standing plans on how to mitigate the effect of a national drought, these did not get the attention they needed. "We didn't ignore this or plan to fail, we just screwed up. We dropped the ball," says one of the three. "There should have been a much stronger campaign to stop leaks, stop people wasting water and to really work on industry and the agricultural sector to use water more efficiently." This would have ensured that more water was stored in South Africa's dams - particularly the five mega-dams that carry most of the country's water, they say.

Sources: [News24](#); [Mail&Guardian, November 2015](#)

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