

Why responsible water usage is crucial

South Africa is one of the world's 30 driest countries and we don't have any truly large rivers.

Plus, much of the fresh water that runs off the land is polluted through industrial activity like mining. We have a growing population and a growing economy. If we don't plan well enough, we may face absolute water scarcity by 2025 which means not enough water to meet domestic, industrial and agricultural needs.

The Department of Water and Forestry (DWAF) and a number of other organisations are working to avert this crisis. Water is recognised as a national asset and the country has been divided into 19 catchment-based water management areas with water being transported between them according to need (water reallocation). There is also focus on increasing the number of households that have a supply of potable (drinkable) water, the reduction of alien vegetation (non-indigenous plants that use excessive water) and improving the quality of our water overall. Vital to maintaining sufficient supply is water conservation. More buildings with systems that recycle 'grey' water (reusing water used for washing and bathing) and that harvest rainwater are being constructed. Awareness is being raised of such things as the importance of repairing faulty taps, adjusting flushing mechanisms and reduced use of appliances.

Recently, DWAF has created legislation that allows it to monitor and manage water usage. Anyone using large quantities of water must register with the department and obtain a licence. If demands on water in that area are too high, licences may not be granted to new users. For instance, some planned golf estates have struggled to get water licences because of their huge consumption of this precious resource.