

50% of SA municipalities have poor or bad drinking water quality - report

The *2023 Blue Drop Watch Report* has revealed that there has been a deterioration in drinking water quality since the last report was done. Presenting the report on Tuesday, 6 June, water and sanitation director-general Dr Sean Phillips noted that in the 2012 report, only 10% of municipalities had bad or poor microbiological water quality, as opposed to 50% in this sample.



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“This indicates that there has been a deterioration in drinking water quality since the last report was done,” Phillips said.

The latest report indicates that the drinking water produced from some municipal water treatment systems during the 2021/22 municipal financial year did not meet the South African National Standard (SANS) 241 standard and could on occasion have posed a potential health risk.

However, the report does not provide an indication of the current status of water quality in municipalities.

Phillips emphasised that in terms of SANS 241 and the norms and standards issued by the department, under the Water Services Act, when tests carried out by a municipality indicate that the water supplied poses a health risk, the municipality must inform its consumers that the quality of the water that it supplies poses a health risk.

He said the department has sent directives to the municipalities identified in the watch report as having systems with poor or bad compliance to inform their residents should they still have poor or bad compliance.

“The public can safely consume water from their taps if their municipalities indicate that the water being provided is being tested and meets the requirements of SANS 241.

“Water Services Authorities (WSA) are responsible by law to inform affected constituencies as soon as there is any change in quality,” Phillips said.



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Andi Rweqane 30 May 2022



Over 40% non-revenue water

The *No Drop Watch Report*, which assesses the status of water losses and non-revenue water (NRW) in South Africa, also showed that the total volume of water treated for municipal use is estimated to be approximately 4.3 million cubic metres per annum.

Of this, the report said, two million cubic metres per annum (46%) is estimated to be non-revenue water.

“This is the volume of water that municipalities are unable to collect revenue for. In 2015 when the last No Drop report was published, the national NRW figure was estimated to be 35%,” Phillips said.

The non-revenue water is made up of water losses and the unbilled component of authorised consumption.

Phillips noted that the international average for non-revenue water is below 30%.

“The national trends suggest that per capita consumption is approximately 216l/capita/day compared to the international average of 173l/person/day. This is an anomaly, given that South Africa is a water-scarce county,” Phillips said.

The No Drop assessment includes the levels of physical water losses in the system, including leaks in pipes, levels of non-revenue water, and the amount of water used per customer per day.

It also assesses whether the infrastructure is properly maintained to minimise wastage; the existence of plans and strategies to reduce water losses, and the effectiveness of metering, billing and revenue collection systems.

The department will in July release the full *2023 Blue Drop Report*, which will be a complete assessment of the state of all drinking water systems in the country, whilst a full *2023 No Drop Report* will be released in September 2023.