

YOUR COMMUNITY WATER PLAN: A QUICK GUIDE

This is a template that can be used by any “community” – be it a neighbourhood, campus, body corporate or institution employing a large number of people.

We need to move from a position of increasing panic to one of adjusting to a “new normal” and a focus on saving water in order to avoid a Day Zero scenario. Even if Day Zero does happen, if we are organised we can make it a better scenario than if everyone only thinks of themselves.

All communities are encouraged to plan for continuity of life and business as much as possible. While there are processes for applying for exemption from water restrictions, or to be excluded from Day Zero, planning for exemption should be the last resort. Everyone is encouraged to save water at home, work and recreation; while also preparing your own continuity plan for home, work and recreation.

The proposed approach is one of “**Connecting and Communicating**”. Connecting means that we offer each other support and strengthen our community instead of allowing divisions and acrimony to grow, and cleave society.

Effective communication is vital so that all members of a community are offered accurate, and up-to-date information from a reliable source.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Connecting

1) Establish a Water Committee to focus efforts

Send out an email asking if anyone wants to join the committee. The committee needs to be formed ASAP so this request should go out quickly and members elected. The first meeting should be held the following week.

2) Establish groups to discuss water and sanitation topics

Encourage the formation of forums/WhatsApp groups. Individuals may be making their own plans, but we are stronger together. Use these first and foremost to distribute water saving tips, and up to date facts about the current situation.

Remember to bring in people of different ages, income groups, languages and genders to ensure that information is spreading throughout the whole community, and that the special needs or concerns of different groups make their way into plans.

In neighbourhoods this may be street groups, in large institutions this may be by department or branch, and on campuses this may be by faculty and residence. Determine what makes the most sense for your community.

If we do experience water cuts, sewerage and waste problems it will be good to

have streets organised, with a plan, in advance. Likewise, for businesses, you want to have plans that keep essential functions going.

3) Identify and contact other organisations

At a neighbourhood level, religious bodies, schools, hospitals, old age homes, shelters and crèches all need water saving information and contingency plans. Businesses in your neighbourhood may also require information, and residents will need to know which ones will still be able to provide their usual goods and services.

Identify and contact these organisations and find out whether they would like a representative to join the water focus committee, and/or receive information and support from the committee.

Encourage these organisations and businesses to institute water saving practices which the committee can help identify.

Also identify which organisations and businesses and other service providers to your community will have special requirements to remain operational and serving the community during a Day Zero scenario.

At a business, campus or body corporate level, contact suppliers and service providers to see how they are being affected by the water crisis and whether they have a contingency plan in the event of Day Zero. Ask them what they will do if their employees can't come to work because they are queueing for water, and whether their own suppliers will be able to continue to make deliveries.

Consider options of twinning across communities; and of temporarily co-locating core services at a location with the strongest water and sanitation demand management systems and contingencies in place.

4) Identify and support the most vulnerable (elderly and sick)

At a neighbourhood level, each street needs to be encouraged to identify the vulnerable residents in their street and find out if they need support.

Likewise, within your company, identify staff who may have dependents with special needs who they will be factoring into their Day Zero plans.

6) Identify boreholes and well points in your network

Within your neighbourhood, network or organisations, branches or supply chain, there may be existing boreholes and well points.

The owners of boreholes and well points can be encouraged to share the groundwater by distributing some water to organisations, vulnerable people (see 4 above) or critical continuity services (social facilities, or commercial services, e.g. retailers and fuel stations). The committee can work out a plan for the collection and distribution of this water.

7) Discuss water saving and contingency plans with employees

We have an opportunity to support employees with their water requirements by sharing information and resources (buckets, containers, water etc). This is also an opportunity for more affluent areas to support areas that are less resourced.

Residents and business owners should talk to employees about their understanding of the water crisis and their contingency plans. If people have to queue for water it will affect their ability to come to work, so have a discussion about how the crisis will affect them. Do not penalise people who miss work or come to work late because of having to collect water.

8) Contact other initiatives and share information

Contact and work with other community initiatives to share information and good practice.

Communicating

1) Establish a Water Crisis Centre for effective communication

Residents, employees, students and members will have questions (e.g. about distribution points, about the safety of drinking water, about whether the sewers will work etc) and it may be more convenient for them to phone a local Water Crisis Centre than the City Disaster Management Centre. Decide on where this will operate from e.g. neighbourhood watch/ civic association/ CID office and who will staff it.

2) Continue to encourage your community to reduce their water usage

Continue to encourage residents, employees, students and members to reduce their water consumption so that they stay within the allocated amount. Day Zero can be pushed back, and even avoided. The power is in our hands. This means reminding people that they have a daily limit that includes the water used at work or when at restaurants, schools or shops. Articles like this

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/citys-model-shows-how-we-can-avoid-day-zero/> are extremely useful and motivating.

3) Day Zero Preparation

As the City announces its plans and the logistics for the distribution of water circulate this information to the people in your community. If the sewer system collapses (for example, if we are unable to flush the toilet with grey water due to a lack of water in the overall system and system blockages) we will have a hygiene and waste problem. We need to consider our options before we get to this point. Portalooos and composting toilets are an option that most people will not want to consider, however it is better to think about this now instead of in the middle of a crisis when we can't source Portalooos.

Some businesses with branches may choose to temporarily co-locate (core or all) functions during this time. Be sure to communicate with staff and local clients and service providers of these plans.

4) Useful supply preparation

While we don't want to panic people, we do want to encourage them to have a plan in case the water is switched off. We can send out a list of things that they could buy in advance.

5) Source publicly available communication materials for public education on sanitation and health.

There is no need to create communication materials as there are many people doing this already. Source these materials from the City, WWF, and others and send them to your community.

6) Send out useful information and links

Distribute posters that people can print for public or domestic bathrooms, as well as links such as <http://tapoff.co.za/download/> which is an app to track water.

7) Compile a list of recommended water-saving products and services

Compile this list from residents or from groups such as the Watershedding group which has been putting together such lists.

Compiled by the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), based on discussions with a range of community water initiatives.



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