

SAPOA LEGAL AFFAIRS

Gauteng and JHB Water Crisis

There have been increasing reports in 2024 relating to the state of the Gauteng water infrastructure and water supply. We have taken note that the trajectory around the water concerns is on the increase, clearly indicating a serious problem for businesses and residents in Gauteng and in particular in Joburg.

The ongoing water crisis results from municipal mismanagement, poor maintenance, system failures due to years of underinvestment and poor maintenance, a lack of planning and investment and not from a lack of water, as reported recently by Coronation economist Marie Antelme. Rand Water can adequately supply municipalities with as much water that they need. This problem is not that there is a lack of water, but that the water cannot be transferred from bulk suppliers to the end user efficiently. Leaks and illegal connections amount to approximately 35% of all treated water in Gauteng being lost before it reaches the end user.

The dire situation of the JHB water challenges are laid out as follows:

- Joburg Water has 129 reservoirs and water towers, with the water level in at least 26 of them being very low, critically low or empty.
- Joburg Mayor Dada Morero estimated late last year that of the 80 reservoirs, around 42 are leaking, and only 11 are being repaired .
- The average consumption in Gauteng is 279 litres per capita per day, which is far higher than the global average of 173 litres per capita per day.
- The City of Johannesburg (CoJ) spends R1 billion a year fixing leaks in its reservoirs and extensive water infrastructure.
- The city needs around R221 billion to catch up on maintenance and overdue infrastructure upgrades.
- This cost does not include the overhaul needed at the city's pumping stations or improvements to its pipe network.
- This comes amid reports that the CoJ is considering tightening water restrictions to artificially reduce demand so its ailing water system can recover.

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- In the City's Commando system of reservoirs, water levels are steadily declining towards 40%, which is historically low for this time of the year.
- Reservoir levels typically reach as high as 80% capacity during the winter as lower demand enables them to be filled up in anticipation of higher demand during summer months.
- This has not been the case this year, as water infrastructure across Gauteng has deteriorated to the point that reservoirs cannot be sufficiently full despite Rand Water pumping at its maximum rate.
- This means the system is leaking more than previously thought. This also cannot be the result of small surface leaks. These are main lines underground that are leaking.
- Things are only likely to get worse, with Rand Water having to cut its delivery of water to Gauteng metros by 10% in the coming months to ensure it remains below its legal limit outlined in its water use licence.
- It is estimated that Joburg's non-revenue water accounts for 49% of the supply. This means that nearly half of all water pumped from Rand Water to Joburg Water is lost before it reaches the end user due to leaks or illegal connections.
- The mayor is in negotiations with Standard Bank and the World Bank, among others, for financing arrangements.
- Beyond debt financing, the city is considering other ways of raising money, including ring-fencing a portion of the revenue collected for an infrastructure fund that will be used to repair power and water equipment.
- Projections are that the city would need between R10 billion and R15 billion just to neutralize or maintain the water infrastructure.

As part of efforts to tackle the crisis of water leakages and infrastructure collapse, 12,100 kilometres of pipelines have been surveyed in Johannesburg.

This revealed the following:

- 2,396 burst pipes
- 6,727 leaking meters
- 442 leaking valves
- 259 leaking fire hydrants



Further compounding the crisis is the delay with the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, Gauteng's most important water source. Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project being delayed by over a decade. The project is currently running over a decade late, and will only contribute additional freshwater to the Vaal River System by 2028.

SAPOA has entered into a partnership / collaboration with the following organisation to address the water problems with the relevant authorities:

- Banking Association of SA (BASA)
- Jhb Chamber of Commerce (JCCI)
- OUTA
- SA Town Planning Institute
- Midrand / Waterfall City Developers Forum

The first meeting with JHB Water (JW), represented by their COO, took place on 1 November 2024 and dealt with the following:

- Status of construction of Reservoirs / Towers Midrand/Waterfall area
- How Developers/Private Sector can work together with Joburg Water to assist with upgrades /maintenance /needed construction in the area of the COJ
- What JW would require in order to further a participation / MOU

The outcome of the session highlighted all the projects earmarked for the 2025 year including the status of construction of reservoirs that will resolve water supply challenges covering the Woodmead, Blue Hills and Halfway Gardens areas to name a few.

In the session, matters related to the maintenance and or upgrades of ailing water infrastructure were discussed, whilst the process of acquiring land together with the lengthy process of the issuing of tenders for these projects were highlighted as reasons for the delays experienced.

Joburg Water has committed to ensuring that our members are kept up-to-date with the progress made in this regard, a follow up session will be arranged and once confirmed, we will circulate the date and time for the follow up session.

SAPOA, with outer stakeholders, is also part of the Platform for Water Secure Gauteng (PWSG). Working with Joburg Water, a programme has been implemented in Soweto,



Orange Farm and Cosmo City and is being extended to other areas including Alex and Ivory Park to address:

- Leaking reservoir / tower infrastructure repairs
- Repair / replacement of Zonal bulk meters
- Active/Passive leak detection
- New pressure management zones and minimum night flow analysis
- Retrofitting and removal of wasteful devices- Prepaid meter installation
- Water pipe replacement • Domestic consumer meter replacement
- Large consumer meter replacement
- By-Law enforcement (disconnections and illegal connections)

Unlike electricity, it is highly unlikely that one can go 100% off grid with water supply. However, we urge property owners to plan accordingly and ensure that advice is taken from water experts on water infrastructure and water security at their assets, and to create a backup water supply and enhance the water efficiency of their operations.