



WWF'S WEDNESDAY WATER FILE

KEEPING THE DOORS OF WORK OPEN

21 February 2018

For the first time in weeks it seems that if we save enough water our actions might result in us avoiding Day Zero. Water is now everybody's business, and consequently there is hope that our businesses and workplaces will continue to function – keeping us financially and economically secure. This week's Water File focuses on the plans businesses should have in place to reduce water demand, diversify the sources of water they are using, and also prepare for a Day Zero in their direct operations, with staff, neighbouring businesses and suppliers.

1. How will the ongoing drought and the prospect of Day Zero impact on my workplace?

Your work life is likely to be affected in a variety of ways. If water is an essential part of the business you are in, you will probably be doing things differently in order to adhere to water restrictions. If you are in an office job, by now you should have altered the bathroom etiquette around non-flushing and the use of hand sanitizers. But a Day Zero scenario would affect many workplaces more gravely. There might be radical changes in operations, such as shorter shifts, flexitime or work-from-home arrangements. There might also be complete shut-downs and possible retrenchments. It will depend on your industry and the level of continuity planning your workplace has been able to achieve.

2. What plans should be put in place and what questions should I be asking my employer?

Your business or workplace should have cut levels of water use by 45%. Ask management to show you evidence of how much water your company was using in 2015, and how much you are using now. Ask if your workplace has a business continuity plan and incident response plan around the drought and Day Zero. If so, request that it be circulated or communicated once it is ready, so you can see what your work has done in terms of risk assessment, drought preparation and to see what plans there are in the event of Day Zero. It will give you an idea what will happen to you as a staff member should Day Zero materialise. Request further clarification if needs be so that you know what to expect. See if there is clarity around reduced working hours, shifts, flexitime or work-from-home. Who has to be at work no matter what (essential services)? Are individual staff circumstances, such as parents with young children whose crèche might close, factored into such a scenario? How will the time needed to queue at distribution points for water be managed?

3. I have been told by my boss that there is a risk of shut-down and me losing my job. What can I do?

Retrenchments are a very realistic and worst-case possibility for employees in industries that are completely dependent on water, for example laundries, textile manufacturers, printers, food-and-beverage manufacturers, gardening services, pharmacies, gyms, plant nurseries, agriculture, hairdressers, bottle-washing factories or pool companies. Domestic workers and gardeners might face a similar risk, if house-owners plan to leave Cape Town during a Day Zero scenario. Some areas of Cape Town have water pressure drops already, making normal operation of business difficult. In case you are faced with a risk of retrenchment, or are worried about it, then it is important for you to have clarity on what decisions have been made by your workplace around the drought and Day Zero. The usual, formal procedures around retrenchment should apply during this water crisis. Staff should be consulted, given sound reasons, given the option of representation, exploring alternative options and fulfilling the correct administrative obligations.

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4. As an employer, how do I put together a business continuity and incident response plan?

The purpose of a business continuity plan is to help you ensure that your business can continue during and following any critical incident that disrupts your normal operations. Many businesses drew up such plans during the energy crisis in South Africa, and now this needs to be reworked for water. What are your risks, how are you preparing and how will things continue during a Day Zero scenario and beyond? An incident response plan would form part of the business continuity plan, focusing on what will happen while in the midst of Day Zero. Templates for such plans are freely available on the web although they are unlikely to be tailored for a Day Zero scenario. The Western Cape Government's **110% Green website** has tailored water-related questions to guide you in the drafting of a business continuity plan. If your staff are better prepared for a Day Zero scenario, it will help in your overall readiness. Share these **Wednesday Water Files** with your staff, and work out how you can assist staff in taking concrete steps to prevent, and prepare for, Day Zero.

5. I've heard the CBD and some other areas will remain unaffected by a Day Zero scenario. Is this true?

At this stage the City of Cape Town (CoCT) has looked at the water supply system in the whole of Cape Town and has overlaid that with key economic nodes and their water consumption levels. The CBD is one of them. The aim is to prioritise which areas will still receive mains water. The CoCT has not finalised the internal review and approval process of these locations as yet. It is a piece of communication that we can expect in the near future.

6. What about the water risks that our suppliers face?

No business works in isolation. There is always a supply chain and their water woes, whether within or outside their control, might in turn affect you and your workplace. Examples are: Hotels and laundry services; food manufacturers and farmers. It is important to engage with people in the supply chain in order to understand how a water crisis affects their operations – and in turn your own.

7. Can the concept of neighbourliness apply in business?

Yes it can. Reaching out to your supply chain, your direct business neighbours and your staff can all be acts of neighbourliness or growing community support. Neighbouring businesses could initiate a discussion around the drought and seek joint solutions, like sharing the costs for alternative water sourcing or joint security planning around Day Zero. Businesses can play valuable roles in informing staff about drought issues, or by offering support to staff at the home-front, where this is needed. Examples could be the payment of a plumber to staff households that struggle with leaks; the purchase and distribution of retrofitting devices for staff to take home; the offer of a workplace crèche in case of Day Zero; and, the distribution of information, like the Wednesday Water Files, to all staff. The more drought-resilient the staff body, the less work disruption there is likely to be.

8. So if we manage to avoid Day Zero, was all of this effort and expense in the workplace for nothing?

All your efforts as an individual, employee or business owner have been essential in getting us to a point where we now have the prospect of avoiding Day Zero. Please knuckle down and continue – as we will not get out of severe restrictions in the next year or two. It is worthwhile to make long-term adaptations in the workplace. Office use – and the resulting water bill – will be greatly reduced in the long term if room is made in our current workplace budgets to invest in retrofitting devices, such as low flush toilets, tap and shower restrictors, waterless urinals for men and women. The "New Normal" that this drought has given us has changed our relationship with water, and all the science indicates this is essential for the long term. It would be a real win if we could turn our crisis-saving steps today into our collective water stewardship for tomorrow. Water is everybody's business.

DAY ZERO PREP - THIS WEEK'S BUCKET LIST:

- **As an employee, initiate a water-related conversation at your workplace, asking your management about a business CONTINUITY PLAN and how much water have you already saved in your direct operations and your supply chain.**
- **As a trade union member, ask your labour representative if there is a stance around water and DROUGHT CRISES.**
- **As a manager, the new financial year is coming up. Ensure that "water saving & adaptation" becomes a prominent BUDGET LINE for the new financial year.**
- **As a manager or business owner, share your plan and water consumption with staff. INFORMATION SHARING builds the relationships that will see us through this together. Share the WWF Wednesday Water Files.**

Useful links:

110% Green
Drought Business Support
Cape Town CCID
WWF Wednesday Water Files