

International Year of Sanitation



CT sewage pumps protected when lights go out

The City of Cape Town has installed special safeguards against load shedding to reduce the risk of sewage spills resulting from non-functioning sewage pumps.

"During 2006, the Koeberg power failures affected almost all of the City's 390 sewage pump stations, resulting in overflows. This has been reduced significantly by the introduction of telemetry systems and upgrading maintenance schedules," reported Director of Water Services Siphos Mosai.

According to Mosai, most pump stations are equipped with a duty pump and a standby pump. When one of the pumps malfunctions, it is removed and sent away for repairs. The standby pump then takes over. It is when a pump is being repaired and there is only one pump at the pump station when the risk for overflows is high.

"The City has now implemented contingency plans for future load shedding and the wet winter season. These include the installation of back-up generators for strategic

sewage treatment plants, as well as cooperation with the City's Electrical Department to plan power cuts in such a way that sewage flows can be managed and spillage into the environment reduced," noted Mosai.

In addition, Cape Town has upgraded its telemetry system which links the 26 municipal pump stations across the entire city to the Schaapkraal control centre via its base station at the Steenbras Water Treatment Plant. The system alerts the control centre as soon as it detects a pumpset failure. This enables the centre to mobilise response teams quickly.

"Experience has shown that power cuts for two hours or less do not cause overflow problems. However, longer blackouts can cause problems, as retention facilities at the stations have a limited capacity," explained Mosai. "During sustained power cuts, residents are advised to use water sparingly, and to flush toilets only when necessary to reduce the City's volume of wastewater."

New booklet to help girls

In celebration of the International Year of Sanitation a guidance booklet on menstrual hygiene management has been launched in New Delhi, India.

While menstrual hygiene is an important sanitation issue it has long been in the closet. An aspect that every girl and woman deals with in their lives, the taboos surrounding this issue in society prevents girls and women from articulating their needs. Subsequently

the problems of poor menstrual hygiene management have been ignored or misunderstood.

Unicef developed the guidance booklet on menstrual hygiene management to serve as a reference and support girls and women in providing basic factual information about menstruation, its hygienic management, and to clarify some myths and taboos surrounding the topic.

Kenyan inmates pioneer sanitation project

At the Shimo la Tewa prison in the Kenyan city of Mombasa, inmates are pioneering a sanitation project that is working with nature to neutralise human waste.

The initiative which involves the development of a wetland to purify sewage, is expected to cost a fraction of the price of high-tech treatments in addition to many environmental, economic and social benefits. The sewage collection and wetland purification system, as well as labour and construction costs and including upgrading of sanitary facilities inside the prison amount to some US\$110 000 or US\$25 per person served.

Apart from wastewater management, the project is also to assess using the wetland-filtered water for irrigation and fish farming, giving prisoners a new source of protein with excess to be sold to local markets. Part of the wastewater will also be used for the production of biogas. The biogas can be used as a fuel for cooking, heating and lighting, thereby cutting electricity bills and saving the prison service.

The project is being financed by the government of Norway and the Global Environment Facility with support from a range of partners, including Kenya's Coast Development Authority and National Environment Management Authority supported by the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and the University of Wageningen, the Free University of Amsterdam and the non-governmental organisation Aqua-4-All in the Netherlands.

Source: UNEP

'First-of-its-kind' MoU signed

The US' Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) have signed a first-of-its-kind Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to increase coordination between the two organisations and make their poverty

reduction efforts more effective.

Focusing initially on Africa, the MoU identifies practical areas for cooperation on the ground in countries in which both the US and UK are engaging in poverty reduction, including Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. The agreement builds on existing cooperation to identify new areas where collaboration between the two organisations can better help partner countries and improve development practice, such as data and statistics sharing, coordinated approaches to issues such as environmental protection, infrastructure projects, transparency in large-scale procurements, rigorous evaluation of aid effectiveness, and future staff exchanges, among others.

It is reported that the MoU provides a solid framework for in-country cooperation to take place between MCC and DFID in a number of sectors, including education, water and sanitation, and governance.

Collaborative efforts needed to tackle sanitation challenge

There is an urgent need to address the issue of sanitation in a sustainable manner involving all stakeholders, especially local governments, communities and investors, maintains UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura.

"Significant advances have been made in the development of low-cost technologies for sanitation, overcoming the technology barrier which was regarded, in the past, as a main cause of slow progress in ensuring sanitation for all. Mainstreaming sanitation at the national level and prioritising sanitation in national policies and strategies is a starting point to accelerate progress," he said. "Strengthened international partnerships will help leverage investment and provide new technological options."

Matsuura reaffirmed UNESCO's commitment to promote science and knowledge to tackle water-related sanitation problems. Among others, the organisation supports research and capacity building in the fields related to sanitation through postgraduate research and training programmes at UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education.

Japan donates US\$4-m for girl-friendly schools

The government of Japan has announced a grant of more than US\$4-million, via UNICEF, to support free primary education and to promote primary healthcare in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This funding, from the government of Japan's Grant Aid scheme for community empowerment, will give some 6 650 pupils access to primary education and will ensure that Congolese students benefit from child-friendly and girl-friendly schools that possess essential school equipment, school supplies, safe water and latrines.

The grant will also fund the opening of seven new community daycare centres that are expected to service some 500 children aged between three and five, along with eight health centres to provide care to Congolese women and children.

Limpopo communities to get improved sanitation

The Mopani District Municipality in Limpopo is to spend R103-million on upgrading water and sanitation services this year, with projects already underway in all five local municipalities in the district.

"We are committed to providing all communities in the district with clean water and decent sanitation by 2010," said municipal spokesperson Tumelo Malaka. He reported that the projects are being implemented with assistance from the Development Bank of Southern Africa, DWAF and the Department of Provincial and Local Government.

The projects include the construction of a new sewerage system in Modjadjiskloof and the installation of bulk water pipelines in Mamaila village in the Greater Letaba Municipality.

Between 2000 and 2007, the district has spent R371-million on water infrastructure, resulting in more than 60% of the estimated million residents having access to a potable water supply. "We will continue to prioritise water provision," said Mokgobi.

Source: *BuaNews*

Political will biggest barrier to improving sanitation



A lack of political will remains the greatest obstacle to efforts to drastically reduce the number of people without access to basic sanitation and clean, running water, according to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Speaking on World Water Day, celebrated on 22 March, he called on the international community to take firmer and faster steps to tackle the problem. "If we take up the challenge, the positive impact will reverberate far beyond better access to clean water. Every dollar invested in water and sanitation yields an estimated seven dollars worth of productive activity. And that comes on top of the immeasurable gains in cutting poverty, improving health and raising living standards."

The Secretary-General described it as unconscionable that a child dies on average every 20 seconds because of sub-standard sanitation conditions – a situation endured by an estimated 2.6 billion people worldwide, or more than a third of the global population, that are preventable. "Poor sanitation combines with a lack of safe drinking water and inadequate hygiene to contribute to the terrible global death toll. Those who survive face diminished chances of living a healthy and productive existence. Children, especially girls, are forced to stay out of school, while hygiene-related diseases keep adults from engaging in productive work."

Ban said that achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015 was far from being achieved. Population growth, widespread poverty and insufficient investment are among the key obstacles, but the Secretary-General noted that the "biggest culprit" is the lack of political will. 