

MEDIA RELEASE



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Department of Water Affairs and Forestry - Chief Directorate: Communication
Services

MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY, MR RONNIE KASRILS

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GOVERNMENT PRIORITISES SANITATION

The Cabinet today approved a White Paper on Sanitation and a national implementation strategy to wipe out the backlog of three million households without adequate sanitation.

Through the implementation of this policy and programme the Government has committed itself to clear the sanitation backlog by 2010. This target is in line with the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme, announced by President Mbeki in his State of the Nation address in February. In order to achieve this, the Government will mobilise resources estimated in the region of R360-million to eradicate the backlog within 10 years.

Most of the households without adequate basic sanitation live in rural areas. They may have limited or no access to appropriate health and hygiene education; they may be using the bucket system or rudimentary pit latrines. In addition, there are increasing incidences where inadequately designed and/or operated water-borne sewerage systems are failing, in some urban areas.

The recent outbreaks of cholera and the 1.5 million cases of diarrhoea in children under 5 every year highlight the importance of safe and hygienic practices together with access to sanitation facilities and clean water. Lack of access to basic sanitation has a negative effect on people's dignity, privacy and quality of life.

All national departments involved in the provision of sanitation have committed themselves to a concerted approach to the national sanitation programme. Local Government is primarily responsible for the implementation programme along with support from the provincial and national spheres of government. As the department designated to lead the Programme, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry will oversee, co-ordinate, monitor and account for its implementation.

Three basic principles are essential to the success of the sanitation programme, namely:

- A developmental approach will be followed which is community based, creates construction jobs for local community members and emerging businesses and enables communities to sustain the services with support from local government.
- Integrated planning will take place within the Integrated Development Planning/strategy processes. The process will demonstrate the sustainability and acceptability of the various sanitation technical options. This approach should encourage local government to target the resources available so that everybody has access to at least a basic level of service and not leave some with high levels of service and others without any services at all.
- A dedicated conditional grant will be provided to local government with the aim of clearing the backlog. This is to ensure that the momentum needed to clear the backlog is maintained. The conditional grant will be subject to clearly defined norms and standards.

The lack of adequate sanitation in schools is also a matter of great concern. It is estimated that 11.7% of all schools in South Africa have no sanitation facilities at all. There is an estimated shortage of 217 339 toilets in schools that already have some, but inadequate toilet facilities.

All new schools must have adequate sanitation facilities. Health and hygiene messages will be included in the school curriculum and the Department of Education is supported in its efforts to ensure safe and hygienic practices in schools by the Department of Health and the Government Communications and Information Services.

The Department of Health is also developing a joint strategy with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to align plans and accelerate delivery of sanitation and water delivery to schools. Sanitation and water delivery to schools in high-risk cholera areas is to be prioritised.

Sanitation is not the responsibility of one institution, agency or individual only. Good health, hygiene, and maintenance of sanitation facilities start at home. The household is supported by local government and other spheres of government to ensure that good sanitation has a lasting positive effect on the health of individuals, the community and society as a whole. To ensure that sanitation reaches households in an effective manner, sanitation planning, implementation and monitoring are co-ordinated on National, Provincial and Local levels through dedicated co-ordination forums.

The returns on investing in sanitation are high. It leads to lower rates of death, sickness and vulnerability to disease, in particular those affected by HIV / AIDS, which leads to savings in health costs. It leads to higher worker productivity and lower absenteeism. It increases the learning abilities and attendance of school children. It heightens personal and national pride.

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