

## ERM raises water alert for business

According to sustainability consultancy Environmental Resources Management (ERM), summer rains are not going to wash away South Africa's water crisis and organisational planning to manage enduring water shortages and rising water costs has now become urgent.

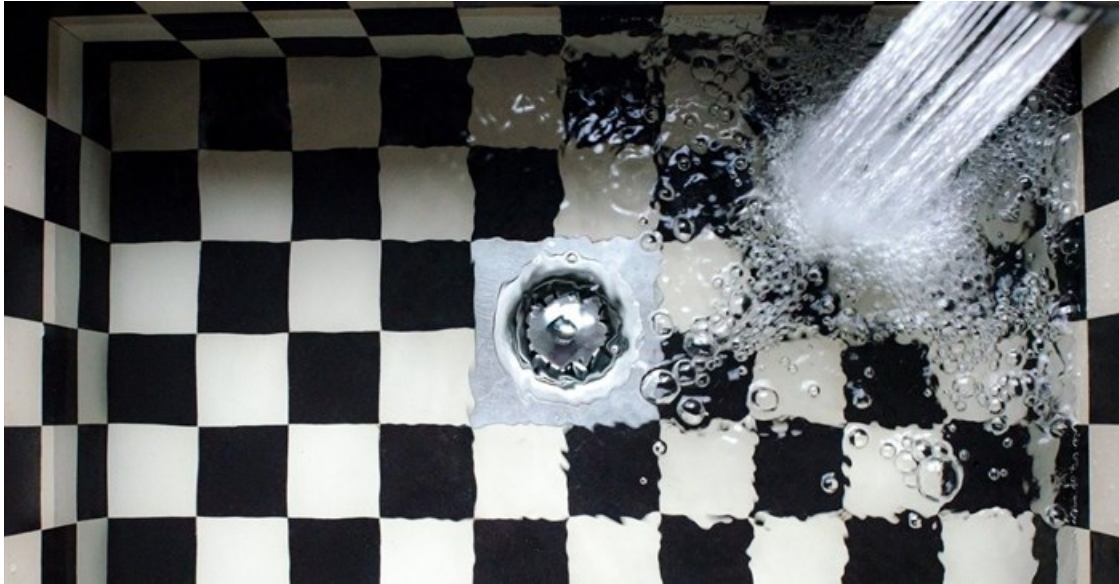


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Dr Henrietta Salter, a Johannesburg-based partner at ERM, says summer rains, good or bad, are irrelevant in the long term as the water crisis has become a permanent feature of prudent business planning and risk management.

“Climate change and growing pressure on the system from a rising population, ageing infrastructure and increased access to drinking water suggest businesses and consumers will have to learn to live with growing uncertainty for water supply,” said Salter.

“The good news for business is that ERM’s recent experience with companies looking to future-proof themselves against water risks indicates ongoing savings can be secured and efficiency gains achieved by implementing simple changes, like recycling and rainwater harvesting.

“Regardless of the amount of rain, water rates are not going to fall and water restrictions will increasingly apply. This is the new normal.”

### Gauteng's challenges

She said Gauteng businesses face particular challenges.

“Johannesburg and Pretoria are the only two major cities worldwide that are not sited on rivers,” she explained. “They’re dependent on water supplied from outside the province and from Lesotho. Prudent businesses should urgently consider current and future consumption and cost implications.”

Demand from companies for water efficiency assessments continues to rise.

“This is true locally and globally,” said Salter. “One driver is sustainable business practice and in-depth reporting of a company’s economic, environmental and social impacts.

“Organisations that measure these impacts rapidly realise that sizeable bottom-line benefits accrue to a business that cuts water usage and optimises limited – and costly – water resources.”

## **Potential savings**

The extent of possible financial savings has been confirmed in South Africa by recent water efficiency audits by companies looking to a water-wise future.

Salter noted that an audit of multiple sites for a major fuel retailer found opportunities to reduce water use by 60-70% by treating and reusing water at the sites. Another audit, conducted for a major financial institution’s property portfolio, indicated a 41% reduction in water consumption was feasible, yielding 36% cost savings.

“A key insight here,” said Salter, “is that even organisations that do not use water in industrial processes have the potential to find significant efficiencies and substantial cost savings.

“Common-sense interventions such as rainwater harvesting, grey water separation and reuse, fixing leaks and taps and the modernisation of plant and systems deliver recurring financial savings. Rigorous cost-benefit analysis confirms it.

“These are quick wins for businesses. It’s time to investigate these benefits, irrespective of summer rains or the latest reports on dam levels.”

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