

South African city rationing water as "Day Zero" creeps closer

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.08.18

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Residents line up to refill water bottles at Newlands Spring on January 31, 2018, in Cape Town, South Africa. Diminishing water supplies may lead to the taps being turned off for the 4 million inhabitants of Cape Town on May 11, known locally as Day Zero. Photo by Morgana Wingard/Getty Images

The water taps may be running dry in Cape Town, South Africa. For some residents, that possibility is almost too much to bear.

For others, the thought of lining up under the scorching summer sun for a meager daily water ration will be a necessary evil to keep their businesses running.

But the day without water, currently forecast for May 11, has been creeping closer. It's been brought forward by the city's excessive consumption despite repeated public warnings from increasingly panicked officials.

"Day Zero": The Day The Taps Will Shut Off

On "Day Zero," as it is called, the ordinary water supply will be shut down and taps will run dry.

Residents of the city of four million will then be forced to collect a daily water ration of just 6.6 gallons from 200 water collection points. That's not even enough for a 2-minute shower in normal times.

With about 5,000 families for each water collection point, the police and army are ready to be deployed to prevent unrest in the lines.

Farrel Cohen is the manager of the Metropolitan Golf Club in a suburb close to the city's World Cup stadium. He said he was "too afraid to even think about" what "Day Zero" would mean for Cape Town.

"Nobody Knows What To Expect"

"Nobody knows what to expect — people are running to supermarkets to buy water," he said.

The central business district will likely be spared a total shut-off to protect jobs and businesses.

But the full impact of a major global city losing its piped, clean water supply is unknown.

Reservoirs around Cape Town, in the grip of its worst drought for a century, have gone largely unreplenished for more than three years and are about to run dry. There has been little significant rainfall.

Residents Urged To Limit Water Usage

Residents have been ordered to use just 23 gallons daily to maintain supply, and that limit fell to 13 gallons on February 1.

A typical shower uses 4 gallons per minute, while a standard toilet consumes up to 4 gallons per flush, says WaterWise, a South African water usage awareness campaign.

Cohen, whose golf courses have suffered from the water restrictions, said that the realities of life after "Day Zero" were hard to understand.

"We haven't been notified, it's a bit of an unknown," he said.

Businesses are feeling the pinch too.

Visitors Canceling Trips To The City

As well as having to deal with costly limits on their water use, tourists from home and abroad have been deterred from visiting South Africa's "Mother City."

"I know many overseas visitors who canceled their trips because of the conditions," said Cohen.

The city has nearly halved its consumption from an estimated 290.5 million gallons a day in 2016 to 155 million gallons daily now.

But every day that Capetonians use more than 132 million gallons brings "Day Zero" forward.

And the fall in consumption is hurting the city in other ways with lost revenues from water bills putting pressure on Cape Town's budget.

Businesses Also Feeling The Pinch

Nikita Elliott is the manager of the "Cape to Cuba" waterfront restaurant in Kalk Bay — a tourist hot spot outside the city center. She is plotting how to keep the business going using only water from standpipes, which is one type of public water collection point.

"It will be a major extra task and I also think it will be very costly — but business is business, we'll have to do what we can to stay afloat," she said.

The restaurant has stopped serving tap water and instead offers bottled water from Durban, a city on the opposite coast.

It has signs encouraging guests to only flush solids, a new blockage alarm to prevent burst pipes, and employees wash dishes by hand rather than machine.

"Doing What They Can" To Conserve Water

"We've gone all the way," said Elliott. "A lot of business owners and regular citizens have taken this into their own hands and are doing what they can."

Marna Esterhuizen says she wants the current daily individual limit slashed in half immediately to avoid the standpipe scenario.

"I also think the name-and-shame option isn't a bad idea. The water map shows what is happening in some of the wealthier neighborhoods and that disappoints me — it is arrogant and shortsighted," she said referring to a published list of the largest water users.

"I miss a nice long shower in the morning, but now I have a timer in the shower to ensure it is only two minutes long."

Some Residents Ignoring Water Restrictions

But less than half of Capetonians are following the current daily water usage limit.

"It is quite unbelievable that a majority of people do not seem to care and are sending all of us headlong towards 'Day Zero,'" Mayor Patricia de Lille said in late-January.

She slammed these people for "callous" behavior and said "Day Zero" appeared "very likely."

Quiz

1 Read the analysis of HOW the MAIN idea is introduced.

The author paints a vivid picture of what "Day Zero" might look and feel like as May 11 approaches and water taps are shut down in Cape Town.

HOW is the MAIN idea developed further?

- (A) The author highlights the city's plan that has been developed over three years and stresses how authorities are strictly enforcing restrictions.
- (B) The author explains the historic nature of the drought and conveys a strong sense of concern and cooperation among the residents.
- (C) The author describes the challenges of getting residents to cut water use and suggests how the shortage may affect the future.
- (D) The author provides more details about water rationing and shares different approaches that residents are taking to deal with the crisis.

2 It will take the collective support of all residents and businesses in Cape Town to endure the water crisis. Everyone has a role to play in the conscientious management of water use.

Which two details BEST support the summary above?

- 1. *It's been brought forward by the city's excessive consumption despite repeated public warnings from increasingly panicked officials.*
- 2. *The city has nearly halved its consumption from an estimated 290.5 million gallons a day in 2016 to 155 million gallons daily now.*
- 3. *"A lot of business owners and regular citizens have taken this into their own hands and are doing what they can."*
- 4. *Marna Esterhuizen says she wants the current daily individual limit slashed in half immediately to avoid the standpipe scenario.*

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 2 and 3
- (C) 1 and 4
- (D) 2 and 4

- 3 Read the sentence from the section "Nobody Knows What To Expect."

Reservoirs around Cape Town, in the grip of its worst drought for a century, have gone largely unreplenished for more than three years and are about to run dry.

The author uses the word "unreplenished" to mean:

- (A) not refreshed
 - (B) not replaced
 - (C) not fulfilled
 - (D) not refilled
- 4 Read the following sentence, then fill in the blank below.

May 11, the designated day that Cape Town's water will be turned off, is referred to as "Day Zero."

The phrase "Day Zero" was MOST LIKELY coined to convey _____.

- (A) an official public warning as water runs out
- (B) the need for reckoning with the situation
- (C) a sense of blame for misuse of water
- (D) the sense of widespread panic

Answer Key

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