

Coal mines need to be taken to task over water pollution

Coal mines in Mpumalanga have polluted about 90% of groundwater in the Highveld region alone. "This is a gross violation of the National Water Act and displays a sheer sense of insensitivity to other water users. Greed for profit has become a norm among the transgressors," David Mahlobo, deputy minister of water and sanitation, said.



Negligence at a disused mine near Siyanqoba settlement in Emalahleni recently resulted in the death of three youths in two separate incidents. These raised the ire of the local community, which took to the streets demanding government action.

The department said that matter has since been referred to the Department of Mineral Resources for investigation, as it relates to actions around mine closure procedures.

According to Mahlobo, the problem of ageing water infrastructure is also a big problem in Mpumalanga.

"Pipes that are made of asbestos cover a distance of 900 km to reticulate water from one area to the other. Invariably, this leads to regular pipe bursts that result in thousands of kilolitres of water going to waste. Infrastructure needs a major overhaul to avert the waste of the precious resource," Mahlobo said.

South Africa is a water-scarce country that was classified by the World Bank as among 30 countries in the world that risk becoming arid unless vigorous water saving programmes are introduced.

According to the department's weekly report on dam levels, Mpumalanga this week stored 1 679.7 cubic metres of water in its reservoirs.

However, the department stressed that the figure doesn't mean there aren't water challenges in the province.

"There are still a few regions experiencing acute water shortages. The report puts the latest dam levels in the province at 66.2%, an 11% drop compared to the same period last year. The need to continue using water sparingly remains paramount," the department said.

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