

9 changes in Cape Town's water by-laws you should note

Cape Town City Council has just approved a range of amendments to the water by-laws as part of its campaign to limit water consumption.



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“Reading through the amendments,” says Rowan Alexander, director of Alexander Swart Property, “It is clear that the city council has tackled this unprecedented drought situation with realism and deserves to be congratulated for the way in which they have gone about it. The amendments will clarify certain grey areas and make Cape Town capable of coping with a water scarce future.”

The city council, says Alexander, has emphasised that the amendments do not replace the level six water restrictions which are currently being enforced and are temporary. Instead, they will be implemented in addition to these rulings and, it should be noted, the new amendments are permanent in nature and are laws, not suggestions or recommendations. Failure to obey them could involve court action and the payment of stiff penalties.

The changes most relevant to the public, says Alexander, are:

1. Landlords must now keep a record of consumption by every individual unit in multi-tenant/sectional title complexes and apartment blocks. They must also inform the city council of any contraventions to the rulings that occur.

“This,” says Alexander, “is a very good move because, as we all know, it takes only one or two irresponsible occupants in a complex to wreck the entire scheme’s water saving efforts. It will improve the landlords’ and body corporates’ ability to manage their tenants’ water consumption.”

2. New developments must have water conservation and demand management systems – or alternative water systems – and these must have the city council’s approval before they are installed.

3. The city council’s control of plumbers has been strengthened by allowing them to remove plumbers from its register – thereby threatening their very livelihood – and to take legal action if they break or ignore the water by-laws.

“This particular ruling is welcome,” says Alexander, “because it will deter those registered plumbers who all too often have certified plumbing systems in homes that do not fully comply with the regulations. Now, in such homes the defaults will have to be put right before they can be sold.”

4. It will soon be possible to install pre-payment city council water meters not only in single homes but in every individual apartment in sectional title or multi-unit complexes. The technology for such meters has not yet been fully accepted by the city council, but under the new by-laws, such meters will be legal and will be recommended wherever they are appropriate or necessary.

5. Potential water storage tanks must now be impervious to sunlight so as to prevent bacterial growth. The vast majority of tanks, says Alexander, already comply with this new by-law.

6. Watering of gardens can only take place before 9am or after 6 pm. This ruling, which replaces one allowing watering before 10am and after 4pm, was seen by some as purely temporary, but has now been made permanent. Now, too, it has been extended to include water from boreholes and well points. Watering in high temperatures, says Alexander, results in unnecessary evaporation.

Even more important, he says, is that the city council is now legislating that non-potable water from boreholes, well points or other sources cannot be added to the householder’s potable water supply. This, says Alexander, has become a common practice throughout the Greater Cape Town area.

7. The allowed capacity of toilet systems has been reduced from nine litres to six litres and showerheads from 9.5 to seven litres per minute.

8. All automatic urinal flushing systems must be replaced immediately with manually operated systems or systems which work automatically only when the urinal is being used.

9. Swimming pools must now be covered whenever they are not in use.

Where existing toilet, shower and urinal systems do not comply with the new by-laws, they will be allowed to remain in operation until they are replaced. At that point, new equipment compliant with the rulings must be installed.

The city council, says Alexander, has also reminded the general public that existing water use by-laws remain in place – even though some of the public are still not aware of them. These by-laws relate to the use of irrigation hoses, garden sprinkler systems, hosing of hard surfaces or paved areas, washing of vehicles, boats, etc. by hose pipe, automatic top up systems from potable water systems (these are very definitely banned), commercial car washing and a variety of similar subjects.

Water usage auditing

Included in the list of amendments, says Alexander, is the ruling that major water users (i.e. those using more than 10,000 kilolitres per month) must submit to the city council a comprehensive audit covering all aspects of the consumer’s water

usage, e.g. the number of people on the premises and the hours that they are there and comparisons with water consumption in previous years. This audit requirement, says Alexander, will be difficult for those without previous record keeping ability to do, but it is an essential part of the entire water management system.

“We have to recognise,” he says, “that some of these by-laws will be difficult to monitor and enforce. However, Capetonians have shown a willingness to comply with whatever appears to be in the public interest and I think, therefore, we can look forward to further success in the city’s attempts to create a water-wise environment.”

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