



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: Immediate

DATE: 7 May 2019

Water Management Devices place the power in the hands of the consumer.

Knysna Municipality is now presenting consumers with the power to determine their own monthly water usage account with the installation of prepaid water management devices (WMD). Knysna Executive Mayor Mark Willemse explained some of the many benefits WMD's hold over traditional water meters, and how these ultimately benefit consumers.

"The installation of these sophisticated management devices is an important aspect of our water affairs management strategy. The rollout of this programme will assist us in protecting this resource in a sustainable manner – and in a way that empowers the end consumer."

"The current situation sees many households that never had water meters installed, and many more with faulty meters or leaks. Leaks not only waste water, but can result in huge charges and accrued debt," he said.

"Council is however addressing the issue of inaccurate billing. At the Special Council Meeting held on 15 April, we resolved to set aside R24 million to write off debt on inaccurate, excessive water services charges. This process will be strictly administered by the financial department and will help in addressing the frustrations of our residents in affected areas."

The protection against excessive water bills as a result of undetected leaks is just one of the many benefits to installing a WDM. Consumers will manage the quantity of water that is used each month. Purchasing prepaid units of water allows residents to budget according to their needs and means.

"Consumers will, in effect, be in control of their own water account," Willemse continued. "On a socio-economic level, it urges all residents to participate in managing our water resources responsibly. It also creates a fair playing field where every household is financially accountable for their water usage, not just those who have traditional water meters installed."

As most households in wards 9, 10 and parts of ward 5 already have traditional water meters installed, the initial phase of this project focusses on wards 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11. Many households within these wards are using water without the usage being measured, resulting in a misconception of overall water availability and a loss of revenue to Council. Communities and residents in other wards are however also taking advantage of the freedom that installing WMD's allows. The Thesen Islands Home Owners Association as well as Waterways Home Owners Association have already resolved to have water management devices installed throughout their developments.

“Although we expect to see an almost immediate increase in responsible water usage, installation of a WMD will not affect the monthly allocation of free water,” Willemse explained. “Indigent consumers will still receive their 6kl of water per month, with other users receiving 3kl per month from July 2019. Once the monthly allocated water has been used, more units may be purchased in the same way that prepaid electricity is currently bought.”

All WMD’s will initially be installed on a free flow basis, with no restriction on the amount of water used per household. Once the program has reached a significant level of completion, Council may resolve to restrict usage on households that measure excessive usage, or users who are using water and/or WMD’s illegally.

“Everyone has the opportunity to have a WMD installed free of charge, including anyone who does not currently have a traditional meter installed,” said Willemse. “Residents who refuse to have one installed during this initial phase will be responsible for any costs regarding future installations. Where households have no meter or WMD, water usage will be estimated and billed accordingly. The onus of demonstrating an incorrect estimate will fall on the owner of the property.”

The project is promoting upliftment and job creation in the area. “Locals from each ward are trained to install these devices,” he explained. “Depending on hours worked and competency levels, these upskilled individuals will be eligible for relevant SETA qualifications.”

“We have been largely met with enthusiasm for this program,” Willemse concluded. “Despite the efforts of a few individuals who are bizarrely trying to turn this into a political matter. It makes sense to have a WMD installed at your property. Not only will it save you money in the long run, it ensures that you are in complete control of your actual water usage – and how much you spend on it each month. I urge all residents to install a WMD, and to join us in making Knysna more inspired, innovative and inclusive.”

Residents of wards not included in this initial phase may apply to have a WMD installed. To do so, please visit the Technical Services Directorate at no. 3 Old Main Road Building, Church Street, Knysna, call 044 302 6331 or contact your ward councillor. A pamphlet describing features of the WMD’s and how they operate will be widely circulated.

ENDS

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