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Why the war on leaks is failing

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Nelson Mandela Bay is losing its war on water leaks, with repair rates plummeting from about 4,000 in June to a mere 400 in January, while the city failed to fix more than 100,000 leaks over the six months.

With the municipality losing 54% of all water treated and distributed into the reticulation system, shortages of trucks, plumbers and equipment have been blamed for the losses.

Overall water losses come from leaks, illegal connections and vandalism.

The figures are contained in an infrastructure and engineering committee report scheduled to be tabled tomorrow.

Infrastructure and engineering acting executive director Joseph Tsatsire said the numbers in the report were not an accurate reflection of the situation, even though the figures were extracted from their system.

"About 60% of the job cards have not been captured but the leak on the ground has been repaired," he said.

He said it took between five and 10 days to attend to leaks.

This comes as councillors say they are being bombarded, more than ever, with complaints from residents about leaks.

They struggle to get officials to respond promptly and are reportedly told the city has no contractors in place.

The report attributes the backlog of unresolved complaints in the system to administrative delays and physical leaks that still need to be repaired.

"Regarding closing complaints [in the system], the department must add additional resources to follow up on job cards," it says.

"Call centre [agents] must follow up on complaints to ascertain if work has been completed."

● Plunging repair rates blamed on shortages of trucks, plumbers and equipment



NO JOY: A recurring water leak in Pearson Street, Central



BURST PIPE: Ward 5 councillor Terri Stander is pulled out of a trench where the city has been repairing a burst pipe under Newspaper House that has flooded the building four times

"Before the issuing of jobs there must be a screening to avoid duplication and for physical leaks all contractors must be provided with orders."

"The intended intervention is for the directorate to have a weekly monitoring tool on backlogs."

"All backlogs must be ring-fenced and a reduction plan developed and monitored."

Tsatsire said that because job cards were not closed

administratively, the system still reflected outstanding complaints.

He said this meant there were about 18,000 additional repairs each month that were simply not captured on the system.

"If you go to the communities you will see that some [issues] have been repaired probably a month ago or so, but there's a backlog in the capturing of the complaints to ensure we allocated the proper resources that were used for the job so we can close it in the system."

According to the report, the city carried over and received new water-related complaints across all 60 wards.

The totals for the city are:

- July — 10,442 complaints and 4,155 repairs;
- August — 11,558 complaints and 3,667 repairs;
- September — 13,206 complaints and 3,748 repairs;
- October — 16,205 complaints 3,193 repairs;
- November — 18,969 complaints and 2,382 repairs;
- December — 21,052 complaints and 813 repairs; and
- January — 25,354 complaints and 445 repairs.

Ward 52 councillor Frans Swanepoel said there had been 73 leaks that were left unattended to in Despatch, with the oldest reported two months ago.

"All the complaints on my list have been reported — they have reference numbers and the date of reporting," Swanepoel said.

"The problem is that the contractor that was appointed to assist with issues in Despatch and KwaNobuhle was [allegedly] not paid."

Swanepoel said a majority

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COOLING OFF: Children play in a fresh water leak in Kobus Road, Helenvale Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAAN



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of faults were reported in December and January.

"There is a long-standing leak in Daleview that affects water pressure in that section of the area."

He said there was hardly any water coming out of the taps at the Oosterland Child and Youth Care Centre as a result.

Ward 55 councillor Thandoxolo Doda said Motherwell had so many leaks that it was hard to provide a figure.

"It has been more than two months since the oldest complaints were reported," Doda said.

"Every time we report, we are told there is no contractor in place."

He said one leak in Khala Street was more than a month old.

"There is another one next to my house that embarrasses me because everyone expects me to have it resolved."

Doda said in the past week, he had received more than 50 complaints about leaks.

Ward 48 (Kariega's Central) councillor Fransy van der Linde said there were complaints reported in January that had yet to be resolved.

"There is an underground water leak on Uys Street that has been reported numerous times," Van der Linde said.

"At one point, officials told me there was a challenge with a vehicle shortage, so they couldn't excavate and there was no contractor in place."

Ward 13 councillor Ingrid van Wyk keeps a list of the water complaints for Helenvale. Most are older than three weeks.

"There are about 30 recorded water leaks in the ward," the councillor said.

"Some are from late last year and the city is trying to attend to them but the work is slow."

"When we inquire about the pace, we are told there is no contractor in place."

Ward 30 councillor Xolani Noshe said though KwaMagazini had many water-related issues in the ward, there was a delay in fixing them because residents did not report them.

Noshe said he was called instead.

"You can imagine how long it would take me to report all the water complaints."

Ward 59 councillor Bulelani Majentwa said municipal plumbers were trying their best to deal with the backlog.

"The municipality has been calling to check on all cases from last year that haven't been dealt with and they are repairing them," Majentwa said.

"There may be delays as to when some councillors get the calls but work is being done."

"In my ward, there are complaints that are three weeks or just over a month old due to a glitch with the contractor since about two weeks ago."

Ward 5 councillor Terri Stander said they had a plethora of leaks that were not directly dealt with by the city.

Her ward includes Mount Cross, North End, Central and parts of South End.

"There are two contractors for the ward, one for smaller leaks for meters and another for pipe bursts," Stander said.

"Contracts are normally entered into for three years, the current contracts are renewed monthly and the contractors don't attend to the major issues unless there is a payment commitment made."

"We are not getting a response from the city in terms of the turnaround times."

"There have been extraordinary delays, especially in

dealing with pipe bursts that are under the tar or buildings.

A perfect example is the Wool Board Exchange, where an underground supply pipe burst and flooded the Feather Market Hall ahead of the last council meeting."

Ward 8 councillor Gustav Rautenbach said though he did not have any issues, it took a while to get the municipality to respond to leaks.

His ward covers Kabega Park, Willow Glen, Glenroy Park, Weybridge Park, Brymore, Ben Kamma, Lorraine, Kamma Park and Lorraine Manor.

"The municipality responds fairly quickly to burst water pipes because they affect many people but when it comes to water leaks it can take weeks before officials attend to them," Rautenbach said.

Mayor Babalwa Lobibe said it was misleading to link water leaks to the unavailability of contractors as the city had plumbers and Expanded Public Works Programme workers assisting.

"We have enough workforce internally to deal with the leaks," Lobibe said.

"We just need proper management of infrastructure to up the game."

'We are struggling to track the cases with our reference numbers because they don't indicate the date a case was reported or the directorate it comes from, which allows some to sleep on the job'

"We were very harsh on officials on Thursday about their response to issues."

"However, I must confirm where we are lacking as a city."

"We are struggling to track the cases with our reference numbers because they don't indicate the date a case was reported or the directorate it comes from, which allows some to sleep on the job."

"We told Tsatsire and others to rework how the reference numbers were produced."

"We do have a backlog but it can't be attributed to the unavailability of workers or the contractors."

On a lack of contractors, Tsatsire said councillors should not be obsessed with contracts.

"The repairing of leaks must be done internally," Tsatsire said.

"The contracts are a stopgap measure."

"I get perturbed when councillors speak of contracts."

"We have been augmenting with contractors but they also have efficiency issues that need to be addressed."

"I can accept that there is a slow turnaround time but on average we attend to leaks in possibly five to 10 days."

"There might be outliers which we can talk about mainly because of the lack of resources issue."

"We don't have the right trucks, equipment. There is a shortage of staff. If you want a plumber, there also must be a truck and four other labourers."

"If I appoint a plumber today, a truck will be available in nine months."

