

## **Now it's a water crisis**

South Africa is on the brink of a water contamination crisis, potentially as bad as the electricity fiasco of the past few weeks, the Business Times reported on Sunday.

In an alarming report, the National Nuclear Regulator (NNR) has confirmed evidence of contaminated crops and water, and has acted to protect people and livestock, the newspaper said.

The report - in the possession of the newspaper - is the latest of several recent indicators that government is no longer able to effectively monitor and manage its vast infrastructure of dams, pipes, pumps and treatment facilities.

Among the alarming findings contained in a series of reports are the following:

43 percent of dams managed by the department of water affairs and forestry (DWAFF) have safety problems and require urgent repair.

An estimated R180-billion is necessary to replace old water service infrastructure countrywide, including in the major metro areas.

Waste water from mining operations appears to have seeped into the country's groundwater system - a process known as acid mine drainage - raising concerns about future water supply.

Vegetables and fish collected in the Wonderfonteinspruit Catchment Area west of Johannesburg have been contaminated with radioactive uranium - and the National Nuclear Regulator is testing milk and meat from cows grazing in the area.

Water in the Wonderfonteinspruit area has also been contaminated by radioactive material, as well as by heavy metals and salts, the Business Times said.

Despite the NNR's latest report - a follow-up to an earlier detailed report of contamination in the area - cattle farming continues and environmental activists are concerned that radioactive meat may be entering the food cycle.

According to the NNR report, contaminated sites are now restricted zones. The report concluded: "The study - has confirmed the presence of radioactive contamination in the Wonderfonteinspruit Catchment Area. Regulatory actions were taken to ensure that people and animals were protected.

The regulator did not reply to Business Times' questions before deadline on Friday. – Sapa

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