

Coca-Cola saves 290 Olympic-sized swimming pools of water

Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa (CCBSA) has announced a saving of almost 726 million litres of water over the past six years, equivalent to 290 Olympic size swimming pools of water, as the country faces its most severe drought in more than 40 years.



In 2010, years before the drought fully hit South Africa, one of the country's largest bottlers, Amalgamated Beverage Industries (ABI), set a target to reduce the amount of water used in its soft drink production by 20% by 2020.

Now known as Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa, the company has exceeded this target by almost four years. By 2016, the company had realised a 30% reduction in water usage or the ability to provide almost 8,000 households with 250 litres per day for a year.

Most illustrative of this is the reduction in water used to produce just 1 litre of soft drink. In 2010, 2.13 litres of water were used to produce 1 litre of the soft drinks it produces. By 2016, only 1.7 litres were needed to produce the same volume – and one litre of this goes into the soft drink itself. The remaining 700 ml is used in the bottling process and recycled where possible.

Minister of Water & Sanitation Nomvula Mokonyane visited the company's Appletiser production plant in Elgin, Western Cape, to see first-hand the infrastructure installed by CCBSA to reduce water usage. Although the company has exceeded its goal in just a few short years, the process to achieve a reduction of this size was not simple or clear-cut.

Water-saving initiatives no longer optional

"In a country such as South Africa, where water resources are severely limited and increasingly constrained, water savings initiatives can no longer be an occasional add-on to existing business practices. We need to interrogate where, how and why we use water in our daily operations," said Velaphi Ratshefola, MD of CCBSA.

“This is the approach we took in looking to save water in our production process, and discovered that CCBSA could save more than just a little water – we could fundamentally reduce our water consumption and our dependence on an increasingly scarce resource.”

To achieve these savings, the merging companies implemented a number of advanced technologies, including electrochemically activated (ECA) and membrane technology, as well as anaerobic digesters.

Both ECA and membrane technologies make use of scientific reactions to clean and disinfect equipment, a vital component of all production in the food and beverage industries. Both result in cleaning processes that are significantly less water and chemical-intensive than traditional cleaning methods. In contrast, anaerobic digesters are used to recycle wastewater more efficiently, which results in more clean, potable water being available for other uses. Performance trackers have been installed across all operations to ensure that these savings are maintained.

“Water stewardship throughout our business is critical to the long-term sustainability of the company. In addition to becoming more water efficient and, where possible, recycling the water we do use, we are also focused on replenishing community water sources in all the areas we operate, and protecting watersheds,” concludes Ratshefola.

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