

Water in South Africa

Water covers about 70% of the surface of planet Earth. This is why Earth is often called the “blue planet”. Nearly all the water in the world (96,5%) is salt water in the oceans.

Only 3,5% of Earth’s water is fresh. Our freshwater comes from rain. Most of the freshwater is frozen in ice at the North and South Poles. Less than 1% of all the water on Earth is freshwater that we use to drink, grow plants, wash and cook. We also use freshwater in mines and factories, and to make electricity.

2. Water vapour in the air cools down and changes back to liquid and forms clouds. This is called condensation.

1. The Sun heats the water in oceans, lakes and rivers. The water heats up and changes into water vapour. The vapour rises into the air. This process is called evaporation.

When sunlight shines through rain it sometimes makes a rainbow.

3. Clouds are made of lots of tiny drops water. The drops are so small and light that they can float in the air. When they join together they get bigger and heavier so that the air cannot hold them any longer. Then the water falls to Earth in the form of rain, hail, and snow. This process is called precipitation.



Green plants release moisture into the air.

4. Water falls in the oceans, rivers or lakes, and on land. The water that falls on land soaks into the ground. This is called infiltration.

5. Oceans and lakes collect water that has fallen. Water evaporates into the sky again and the cycle continues.

Water pollution

Water is polluted when it is dirty and unsafe to drink or to play in. People pollute water by throwing rubbish in the water. When people use soap and washing powder to wash themselves or clothes in rivers, they also pollute the water. Factories and farms can pollute water by pumping chemicals and other waste materials into rivers and dams.

Wastewater and the water-use cycle

Wastewater is dirty water that runs down the drains and toilets of our homes, schools, offices and factories.

Wastewater flows through pipes that are called sewers. The sewers take the wastewater to wastewater or sewage treatment plants. Here the water is cleaned before it is returned to rivers or the ocean.

Water is a valuable resource, and must be returned to the natural water cycle.

New words

vapour – water in a gas form

moisture – small drops of water in the air

borehole – deep, narrow hole in the ground to find water

communal – for the use of many people

How people get their water

Most South Africans get their water from taps, especially people who live in cities and towns. Some people get water from boreholes. Others get their water from rivers and communal taps. They may have to walk far to fetch water.



Storing water

Most of South Africa does not get rain all year round. Many parts of the country get very little rain. It is important that we protect our water supplies and store water for dry times. For example, we build dams to store water.