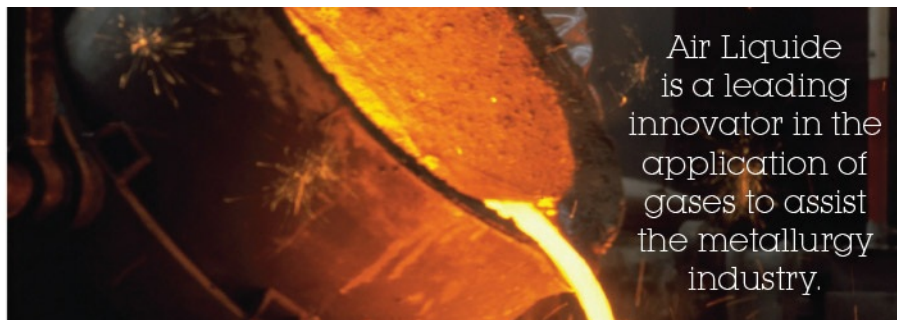


# Drought-proofing your business means tackling risk

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## Disaster Management

WITH large portions of the Eastern Cape currently declared disaster areas due to the persistent drought, businesses really need to prepare for water shortage emergencies, according to Rob Gardiner, principal environmental scientist in SRK Consulting's Port Elizabeth office.

Municipalities do have access to funding for drought relief measures, said Gardiner, but the example of the delays in funding for the Nooitgedagt treatment works demonstrates that there are significant challenges to these efforts – even with the disaster declaration.

“The result is that there now exists a real risk to business continuity, as has occurred in some parts of the Western Cape,” he said. “Measures to respond to the drought, particularly interruptions to water supply, should therefore form part of an emergency preparedness and response plan.”

In essence, companies should be using 80% less municipal water than they were using before the drought. Many companies have implemented a host of measures, including water conservation and exploring alternative sources of water. Water conservation measures, he said, need to be implemented and publicised, as do identifying alternative sources of water.



"Rain water harvesting is a useful water conservation initiative and a legal requirement in some municipalities," said Gardiner. "Alternative sources of water are in most cases limited to groundwater supply and, in coastal settings, desalination."

The biggest concern in desalination is usually the impact on the marine environment from the discharge of brine, and so a Coastal Water Discharge Permit is required. Groundwater abstraction requires a Water Use Licence and this will only be issued if the water use is sustainable.

He highlighted, however, that the risks industry faces extend beyond having the taps turned off; the dangers include reputational risk, as finding alternative sources of water may lead to a perception that a company is taking this water from communities or other users.

"Merely having the permits to desalinate or abstract water does not address potential reputational risks, and companies should be implementing strategies to address these risks. The more proactive the measures are, the more readily reputational risks can be managed."

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