



Daily News & Analysis

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Sunday, April 01, 2007 2:41:00 AM

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No shortage of wastage

Neeta Kolhatkar

Faulty water meters and low usage charges encourage Mumbaikars to be profligate in their consumption of water. Kolhatkar reports

Aditi Vora, an investment banker living in Santa Cruz, recently installed shower jets, which branch out into most of all three bathrooms of her home. She had no clue how much extra water they use. "Our interior designer only says that showers require more force, for which she installed pumps," says Vora. "Frankly, I had no idea they use a lot more water than the normal showers."

Municipal engineers say such high-end appliances, which have hit the market in a big way of late, are contributing to the wastage of water in Mumbai. "They have high water usage and should not be installed," said TV Shah, an official in the hydraulics department, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

BMC surveys have shown wide disparities in domestic consumption of water, which exceeds the national norm of 135 litres per person in many areas of Mumbai.

"Only in the old buildings and chawls do the residents use less than 135 litres a day per head. Most others use more on an average. Obviously then there will be supply problems," says Shah.

The need to be more frugal in using water comes from a growing demand-supply gap which, by the BMC's own estimates, is 900 million litres a day — nearly a quarter of the demand. A Tata Institute of Social Sciences study put the shortfall even higher, taking into account an estimated 25 per cent loss in leakage and pilfering. Growth in population and new housing in the city will only add to the shortage, leading to supply interruptions, unless conservation measures are enforced.

The main step towards cutting consumption will be setting up of water meters and a variable tariff structure, which will give people a reason to watch their usage, as in the case of electricity.

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