

## Give Me Back, My Little Brass Tap

If you wake up in the morning without water, the chances are good that you have been the victim to the theft of your water meter. The police believe this is the handiwork of a syndicate selling copper and brass to scrap metal dealers. These thieves are stealing anything containing these materials, including pipes, electricity meters, taps, phone lines, manhole covers etc. I would like to concentrate on the theft of the objects that affect our water supply and the havoc being caused by the theft of these. The syndicate targets the older areas that still use the initially installed brass meters, which they receive more money for than the newest plastic meters that are now installed. When a water meter is removed, the flow of water from the main pipe to the house is broken and the house then receives no water. Meters costing hundreds of Rands are sold to the scrap dealers for anything between R10 and R30 a meter, the scrap dealers then melt these and sell them at great profits. The theft of these water meters ultimately affects us, the consumer. The municipality has to pay large amounts of money to have the meters, taps and various other missing materials replaced, increasing the labour costs and affecting the service delivery of other jobs. The cost comes back to the consumer in increased water services prices.



Manhole covers are also frequently stolen, which provide problems of their own. Manhole covers are there to protect the underground infrastructure and for the protection of the general public. Deaths as well as disappearances have been reported due to open manholes. The community needs to take a stand, we need to work together and report illegal behaviour to the local municipality. The theft of brass taps usually take place in the early hours of the morning, with residents waking up to water flooding their gardens and gushing down the roads. The cost of replacing these taps is one thing, but the cost of the water that is wasted is a completely different story. With taps left running thousands of liters of water are wasted, this water that has already incurred purification and distribution costs, but nobody can benefit from at when it is flooding the surrounding area. It has brought attention to the fact that the municipalities have had to neglect their maintenance functions to some degree to provide basic water and sanitation services to consumers. With this all said and done, the infrastructure is still vandalized, stolen and damaged. We can ultimately not blame the municipality for poor service delivery when it is the individuals in our communities that are adding to the difficulties. We need to take responsibility for our actions, with each tap and meter that is saved from theft, money can be spent to upgrade the quality of life that we live. First and foremost, it should be used to upgrade our sewage plants, in order for us to be able to clean up our rivers that are becoming increasingly polluted each day. If we are serious about our future, we will stop pointing fingers at the government and our municipalities and see that change starts with us.

**Cara Willoughby**

