

Water shortage predicted amid dry spell

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Ehud Zion Waldoks , THE JERUSALEM POST

Despite cutbacks and conservation efforts, there will still be a gap of roughly 100 million cubic meters (mcm) of water between demand and supply this year, National Infrastructures Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer told the cabinet on Sunday morning.

Rainfall has been incredibly scarce through the middle of January - the worst in recorded Israeli history - and is not expected to improve significantly, he said.

In spite of a successful conservation campaign among the public, cutting 100 mcm. off of agriculture's allocation, reducing gardening to the bare minimum and desalinating water, the paucity of rainfall this year has Water Authority forecasters predicting a shortage.

At the end of the briefing, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered the Water Authority to come up with another emergency plan within a very short time to address the problem.

Water Authority spokesman Uri Schor told *The Jerusalem Post* Sunday night that they needed the public's assistance to bridge the gap.

"We have to reduce demand. Israelis use a relatively large amount of water and we need to get out the message that there just isn't any water [and so people must conserve]," he said.

While urging the public to conserve water, Schor said the authority had no intention of rationing water to households at any point.

In comparison, Jordan rations its citizens' water quite severely.

Schor said that they had brought in small portable desalination pumps and had increased the existing large plants' output, but there was still going to be a deficit.

Water Authority head Prof. Uri Shani presented the ministers with graphs showing that the median rainfall in Lake Kinneret from 1980 to 2007 was 328 mcm. per year. By 2006, that number had dropped to 220 and even further in 2007/8 to 82.

For 2008/9, they were expecting just 45 mcm. of rain to fall in the Kinneret, Shani said.

The probability of such a dry year following four dry years was zero, he added.

Current drought predictions far exceed those the authority had included in its emergency plan. Even in a lean year, their prediction was that 335 mcm. more rain would fall. Now, however, the Water Authority is predicting that just 60% of the

median amount of rain will fall in 2009, or 626 mcm. Their original predictions from several months ago forecast a lean year of 961 mcm. of rain.

Even when submitting its emergency plan, the authority was aware its predictions could turn out to be too generous. However, they declined to detail what extra measures they would take to make up the shortfall, saying they would wait until the end of January to see if the extreme measures were needed.

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