

## **Municipality stricter on illegal water and electricity connections – Make use of amnesty period**

Water is becoming a scarce commodity and the community is trying their utmost to save water. However, there are some residents in the Swartland that tamper with meters or have illegal connections on their properties. Although an amnesty period of two months were granted in August 2014, very few property owners came forward to report such irregularities to the municipality.

Recent audits on water losses revealed several illegal connections and/or meter tampering, which impacts significantly on the municipality's ability to collect revenue. The property owners were charged with a tampering fee of R1 500.00 as well as R5 000.00 for damaging the property of the municipality. Water used over previous years were analysed to determine illegal usage and billed. However, it appears that the offenders are not deterred by the current fines raised by the municipality and criminal proceedings were instituted against these property owners as well. **This can result in a criminal record or even imprisonment for theft and fraud. The names of people charged with other criminal offences have recently been published in local newspapers. *Do you want to be associated with this?***

An illegal connection to the water and/or electricity network is a crime that occurs in all towns and areas in the Swartland. Ruthless individuals or groups seem to approach the public to install such illegal connections or tamper with meters in return for nominal compensation. This however, does not indemnify the owners of properties that criminal charges will not be taken against them. It is therefore critically important for water and electricity theft in the Swartland to be regarded in a serious light, and that those involved should expect no mercy.

The municipality has now embarked on implementing another amnesty period for a month from 1 August to 31 August 2017 on illegal connections. This amnesty offers residents, who have their water/electricity connected illegally, a chance to disclose this to the municipality in order to legalize the connection. Consumers who make use of this window period to report any transgressions in this regard will not have to pay the fine associated with illegal connections and no criminal charges will be imposed on those involved which can lead to a criminal record and/or even result in imprisonment.

Residents can perform tests themselves by verifying the following:

- that seals on meters are not damaged or removed;
- by opening each water tap separately and ensure that the usage is metered; and
- that all outlets (plugs/ lights/ geyser) are tested separately to ensure the usage registers on the municipal meter.

However, when identified they should not fix the illegal connections themselves as it can be dangerous or result in further damage to the municipal property causing leakages.

Illegal water connections are currently costing the municipality a significant amount in revenue while placing our water infrastructure under severe stress. Water and electricity theft have far-reaching consequences for other residents as the municipality has to recover these costs through escalated tariffs and/or increased fines where such connections are found. Therefore, **the municipality encourage members of the public who may be aware of any illegal water and electricity connections, meter tampering or anyone else's involvement in any form of unaccounted use to report it. The municipality will offer a reward in accordance with its Rewards Policy should such connections be found and trespassers be convicted. It is in the interest of all Swartland residents to combat this evil.**

To report illegal connections, phone the internal auditor on 022 487 9400.

Swartland Municipality will take a tough stance against residents who have illegal connections on their property and tamper with meters after the amnesty period has ended.

rby is.