

DURBAN GETS THUMBS-UP

All-clear for water quality

COLLEEN DARDAGAN

DURBAN has scored 96 percent in a water quality audit conducted by the government's water authorities, which was aimed at assuring the quality of drinking water ahead of the World Cup.

Yesterday, Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Buyelwa Sonjica released the audit in Cape Town, saying all nine host cities complied with the Blue Drop incentive-based regulation system, a programme aimed at improving water quality management.

Cape Town scored 98.18 percent, Joburg 98.39 percent and Pretoria 96.36 percent.

Sonjica said the audit was aimed not only at assuring World Cup visitors of the quality of drinking water, but to

encourage them to drink water as their "thirst quencher of choice".

"Our confidence is high as far as the manner in which the drinking water quality is being managed by the various authorities. Their efforts have ensured that I can now officially announce Blue Drop status for all nine host cities."

Steven Lambert, former head of the water quality inspectorate in England and Wales, who accompanied the audit team, said he had been impressed with the Blue Drop programme. "I will happily drink the water," he said.

Frank Stevens, acting head of the eThekweni water and sanitation department, welcomed the announcement.

"There are not many cities in the world where it's safe to drink water out of the taps.

This is good news," he said.

Stevens said Durban's drinking water quality had always been high. "We buy our treated water in bulk from Umgeni Water. We then re-test the water using our own laboratory."

The criteria for Blue Drop status includes the assessment of water safety planning, process controlling and maintenance skills, monitoring programmes, credibility of the laboratories being used and actual water compliance. First launched in 2008, it is now envisioned that municipalities across the country will be assessed on an annual basis.

The eThekweni Blue Drop audit identified problems with incident management at the call centre and said that the monitoring programme between Umgeni Water and the

municipality might need to be improved.

Questions were also raised over the cleanliness of the Montille Reservoir, as no schedule could be found detailing when last the sediment had been cleaned or that any such activity had ever taken place.

Stevens said all these issues were being attended to.

Municipalities which fail the audits are given a Red Drop and the water affairs department has launched a link on its website - www.dwa.gov.za - called "My Water" to name and shame those who fail the test.

However, there was no word on how the department intended to convey to World Cup visitors that tap water is safe to drink. Department spokeswoman Mava Scott said she was unaware of any related awareness campaigns.

