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# PULP & PAPER

## Saving Water in South Africa's Toilet Paper Industry

### Every Roll Counts

#### The hidden cost of a simple roll

It's easy to overlook, but toilet paper is one of the most water-intensive household products we use. In South Africa, producing one roll of toilet paper uses around 140 litres of water plus 1.3 kWh of energy. Multiply that by millions of rolls made each day, and the environmental cost adds up fast.

*A single factory can consume millions of litres of water weekly in a country already facing severe water stress.*



#### Pulping:

Turning wood into pulp requires massive amounts of water to soften fibres.



#### Bleaching:

Traditional whitening processes rely on high-water chemical treatments.



#### Washing & Refining:

Repeated rinsing stages clean pulp for paper formation

#### Converting & Finishing

Water cools, cleans, and lubricates machinery during production.



*Each step in the chain leaks potential savings.*



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## The big impact

- Producing millions of rolls = billions of litres of freshwater lost every year.
- Factories also generate wastewater containing chemicals and fibres that strain treatment systems.
- Water-scarce regions in South Africa face rising tension between industrial use and community needs.

### Smarter ways to save every drop

- Use recycled fibres instead of virgin pulp.
- Adopt low-water bleaching and closed-loop processing.
- Install leak detection and fix losses in pipelines.
- Reuse process water through filtration and grey-water recycling.
- Digitize water monitoring to track real-time use and spot inefficiencies.
- Partner across sectors — manufacturers, municipalities, and NGOs — for shared water stewardship.



**Water  
tips**

## A South African roadmap for action

- Set industry water-use benchmarks and public reporting standards.
- Offer incentives for factories investing in sustainable water technologies.
- Tighten regulation and enforcement on effluent discharge.
- Support training and capacity building for factory operators and municipal engineers.
- Encourage consumers to choose eco-labelled, recycled toilet paper.

## Final thought

South Africa's paper producers stand at a turning point. By transforming how toilet paper is made conserving water, reusing what's possible, and innovating at every stage, the industry can help secure the country's most precious resource.