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Every drop of water needs to be conserved in UAE, says expert

Recharge wells 'must be built in different parts to store rainwater'

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Dubai Rainwater should be harvested in the UAE to increase options for potable water and reduce dependency on desalination plants, according to a member of the World Water Council.

Currently, around 50,000 wells exist in Dubai that draw water from the ground yet none exist to pump rainwater back into the ground, according to Mustafa Taherali Saasa, Middle East director of International Rainwater Catchment Systems Association and member of the World Water Council.

"The city is like a pot with no outlet for the water. Recharge wells need to be built in different parts of the city to catch and store

rainwater. These wells have filters to remove carbon dioxide and limit contamination," said Saasa.

"Earlier, rainfall in Dubai was limited so storage was not considered. We are conducting a rainfall survey but there is a high variation of rainfall from year to year. The good thing is that rain is increasing."

Increasing salinity

More wells are needed urgently, according to Saasa. "The UAE has the highest consumption of water in the world and high dependency on desalinated water. With 30 per cent of saline fluid being released back into the Gulf its salinity is increasing but you can only really desalinate water two to five times," said Saasa.

It takes about 200 years for the Arabian Gulf to be flushed out and renewed from the Indian Ocean by natural currents, he added.

"From Ras Al Khaimah to Kuwait, on the Arabian side, desalinated water is depended on but with wells this could be lessened. Every drop of water needs to be conserved in the UAE and awareness is vital," he said. The best way to store water is in aquifers — the natural underwater canals water travels in. By having wells which nourish these aquifers with rain water salinity would be diluted.

"Water catchment wells could be installed in the parks and green areas as well as on the open plots across Dubai ... A big community effort is needed," said Saasa.