

FROM WFOT President
Dear Colleagues

Re: Cape Town Water Shortage

Further to my previous message I am sure many of you have seen the increasing press coverage regarding the water situation in Cape Town. Following this previous communication, this message serves to provide more information about WFOT 2018 congress, Cape Town as the choice of venue and WFOT executive actions to address the current situation.

The WFOT Executive have kept in close communication with the international and local professional congress organisers as well as the local organising committee, Team South Africa.

When WFOT chose to hold this Congress in Africa – 6 years ago - it was acknowledged that this was the first ever congress to be held in Africa. This destination was chosen to showcase the occupational therapy practices and diversity of this region. The challenges faced in many African countries are quite unique and there are many lessons to be learned by the wider international occupational therapy community – a phenomena that was first experienced at the 2010 Congress in Chile. In Chile we were faced with a major earthquake 6 weeks prior to the Congress – a daily reality in that part of the world. Water shortage is a daily reality throughout many parts of Africa. In 2010 the international occupational therapy community rallied around which led to the resounding success of that Congress and we are asking you all to do the same for this one in South Africa.

The Organising Committee, including local occupational therapists, have worked extremely hard in bringing together the programme, which reflects the diversity and contribution of the global south. WFOT has also used local suppliers including Township projects to source goods and services for the Congress. This is why WFOT is supporting Cape Town in their water crisis and are working on ways to minimise the impact of our delegates on the resources whilst providing much needed funds for the local economy.

Day Zero is now set for June 9th and in considering the current situation WFOT is faced with a vast range of complex issues and I want to share the different facets that have been considered.

WFOT is currently consulting with its Executive Project Team on sustainability and sustainable practice to consider ways of reducing the ecological impact of holding the Congress in Cape Town and contributing to the local economy and ecology. This group will continue to consult with the Executive team to inform all decisions moving forward.

Tourists only make a “small impact” on the water consumption during the peak season for example during peak season (December – January) at any time, foreign tourists make up less than 1% of the Western Cape’s total population and by employing a few water-wise practices tourists and local visitors can avoid placing undue strain on water supply. We all need to be mindful of the water shortage conditions and contribute to the water saving measures.

One immediate change will be the shortening of the Executive and Council Meetings (prior to the Congress) from two weeks to one week with the Executive Management Team Meeting being held on May 16th and 17th and the Council Meeting being held on May 18th, 19th and 20th.

WFOT is also considering ways of supporting or participating in projects to proactively helping the community of Cape Town during the water crisis. Local personnel are currently working on identifying opportunities.

Concerns have been raised regarding the “stockpiling” of water, taking it away from local residents. Cape Town’s central business district will be excluded from the “Day Zero” measures specifically to reduce harm to the local economy. The contribution to the economy from direct and indirect tourism is an essential one that sustains thousands of locals through employment. The Cape Town local economy will suffer due to businesses having to close down if they have insufficient resources for their employees.

The tourist board has issued a list of 9 ways visitors can help conserve water.

1. Choose to stay in accommodation that has water-saving measures in place
2. Re-use your towels instead of asking for a new one daily
3. Try to flush the toilet as little as possible. Each flush uses between 6 and 14 litres, depending on the kind of toilet
4. Use a cup to rinse your mouth when you brush your teeth rather than letting the taps run
5. Limit your showers to two minutes, and avoid bathing
6. Report leaking taps and toilets as soon as you notice them
7. Avoid washing clothes until you have a full load’s worth of laundry
8. Take a dip in the ocean instead of swimming pools, and maybe even spare yourself a shower
9. If possible, use a dishwasher to clean dishes. just make sure you only run it when it is full

Of course, we will continue to monitor the situation closely and we ask you to take the usual precautions when travelling and ensure you have adequate travel insurance. WFOT cannot take responsibility if the situation worsens, however we remain committed to this Congress and we will keep you all informed as and when any further information comes to light.

WFOT also acknowledges that some of you may not agree with this decision and some of you will be supportive of our reasoning. This is a risk that WFOT faces with very decision it makes and I ask you as members and member organisations of WFOT and the global occupational therapy community to show its support for our African colleagues and participate in this exciting knowledge exchange that can only serve to enrich occupational therapy practice globally – see you in South Africa.