

Precious resource is literally draining away

Expert says the UAE's ground water will disappear unless we stop pumping now

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The UAE is in danger of permanently losing its ground water resources unless serious measures are taken immediately, according to an expert in the field.

Dr Ahmed Murad, assistant professor of Hydrogeology at UAE University, said yesterday: "I recommend we stop pumping ground water for the next few years to give the aquifers a chance to recharge.

"If we do not do this, or something else, very soon to cut back on our outtake, there is a chance we will lose our useable ground water permanently."

Dr Murad was speaking at the second conference entitled Municipal Action from Legislation to Implementation in Ajman.

Currently, ground water is mixed with desalinated seawater, which is then piped into homes across the Emirates. Dr Murad said the Government

needed to either forgo ground water completely, or look to recharge the water tables with desalinated seawater, or in the near future there will be no drinkable well water in the country.

"Water is contained in underground pockets. If you completely empty them, which is likely as the UAE tries to meet the needs of its booming population, they can collapse and you will not be able to recharge that water table. It will be gone," the professor explained.

"Extraction of water from the ground is already known to be increasing the levels of sodium, chloride and even nitrates in agricultural areas.

"Water with high levels of these chemicals is not potable and cannot be used for domestic purposes," Dr Murad said.

The UAE's total annual surface runoff produced from rain is about 150 million cubic metres, but there are no perennial streams. The average annual ground water



■ Natural ground water is too precious to waste, says expert

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recharge is about 120 million metres, most of which comes from water seeping down from riverbeds. The total ground water extraction during the year 1995 is estimated at 1,615 million cubic metres.

This means that ground water depletion probably amounts to almost 1,500 million cubic metres per year.

DRY DESERT

The United Nations *Environmental Global Deserts Outlook 2006* highlighted the UAE as being one of the most water-imperilled nations in the world, with less than 250 cubic metres of renewable fresh water per person per year.