

Salty Dilemma

Posted by Joan Russow

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By Tharanga Yakupitiyage



A desalination plant. Across 177 countries, there are now 16,000 desalination plants, many of which are concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa where water scarcity is already a reality. As desalination plants continue to pop up, so does a hypersaline, chemical by-product known as brine. Credit: RoPlant

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 16 2019 (IPS) - As the threat of water scarcity increasingly grows, many have turned to the Earth's plentiful oceans for a solution. However, this has created a new risk threatening public and environmental health: brine.

In a new [study](#), the United Nations University's Institute for Water, Environment, and Health (UNU-INWEH) assessed the state of desalination around the world as countries increasingly convert sea water into freshwater for its citizens.

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“There is an increasing level of water scarcity across the globe, but there are hot spots of water scarcity like those in the Middle East and parts of Africa. They really need an additional supply of water that they can use to meet the requirements of their population,” one of the report’s authors Manzoor Qadir told IPS.

Across 177 countries, there are now 16,000 desalination plants, many of which are concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa where water scarcity is already a reality.

As desalination plants continue to pop up, so does a hypersaline, chemical by-product known as brine.

In fact, for every litre of freshwater a plant produces, 1.5 litres of brine is produced, a figure that is 50 percent more than previously estimated.

Globally, desalination plants produce enough brine in one year to cover all of Florida in one foot of the waste.

“Historically what we used to see was the equal volumes of brine versus desalinated water—that is not true...there is more brine produced than desalinated water. It really needs efficient management,” Qadir said.

