

COMMON DONOR GREENING PRIORITY ACTIONS



PRIORITY ACTION 7

Avoid water trucking except as a last resort. If used, include a strategy to phase it out

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Water trucking is often a straightforward - and in some cases the only - means of delivering life-saving water in emergency contexts. However, it is a costly, inefficient, and unsustainable practice with significant negative environmental and climate impacts. Water trucking is frequently associated with poor traceability of water sources and the unsustainable extraction of water. It can also be constrained by limited regulation and monitoring of water quality.

Emergency water trucking to drought-affected communities - especially in the Horn of Africa - has become a recurring response as rainfall grows more unpredictable. Beyond being costly and unsustainable, this practice appears to undermine pastoralist livelihoods, weaken traditional coping mechanisms, and drive up water prices¹. Moreover, water trucks are typically diesel-powered, generating greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. As a result, the distribution of water through trucking should be considered a **temporary, last-resort measure**, to be used only while more sustainable and permanent solutions are developed wherever possible.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Consider opportunities for alternatives to water trucking in the early stages of humanitarian response, such as use of water purification tablets² if freshwater sources are available (but do not meet minimum water quality standards) as a short-term measure.
- ✓ Identify and recommend medium- to long-term solutions that reduce reliance on water trucking, such as addressing leaks, rehabilitating or repairing existing water points or pipes, construction of new water supply systems, wastewater reuse and rainwater harvesting. This could be accompanied by awareness-raising with local communities to promote responsible water use during acute shortages.
- ✓ Liaise with local stakeholders to understand public policies on access to and management of drinking water services.

Where water trucking is required

- ✓ Inform your donor, explaining why water trucking is the only adequate solution and discuss different phase out options.

¹ See, for example [Technical Brief: Water trucking in drought emergencies \(Oxfam\)](#)

² It should be noted that water purification tablets are effective primarily against bacteria and viruses, but are not suitable for treating chemical pollutants, salinity, or high turbidity. When distributing water tablets, clear instructions should be provided on the correct dose, waiting time before drinking, and how to check that a safe level of chlorine remains after treatment.

- ✓ Engage with the humanitarian coordination system (for example, the WASH Cluster) to mobilise coordinated sector action for alternative solutions.
- ✓ Establish a clear transition and exit strategy in the short- to medium-term.
- ✓ Conduct environmental screenings/assessments of planned interventions, using tools such as the Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool/NEAT+ (*see PA 1 Guidance Note*) and integrate risk mitigation measures in project design.
- ✓ Work with *formal* water trucking service providers and, as a minimum, verify that they:
 - Hold the necessary legal authorisation to extract water from the identified sources
 - Do not extract water at a rate exceeding natural recharge, and have assessed the impacts of water trucking on existing users of the water source
 - Apply and monitor the relevant water quality standards consistently throughout extraction, transport and delivery.
- ✓ Take measures to reduce wastage during water distribution. For example, set daily water limits per person, use simple flow controls on taps, and manage queues to prevent spillage.



KEY RESOURCES

The Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+) WASH Activity Module

- **Organisation responsible:** developed by the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit, USAID, UNHCR, NRC, IUCN, WWF with support from DG ECHO
- **Short description:** NEAT+ is a rapid and simple project-level environmental assessment tool (*see Guidance on Priority Activity 1*). The WASH module questionnaire contains questions about the planning, sustainability, and risk management for planned water trucking.
- **Accessibility:** download the tool [In English here](#); [In French here](#); [In Spanish here](#)

Guidance on the operationalisation of the minimum environmental requirements and recommendations for EU-funded humanitarian aid operations (Section on WASH, pages 55-62)

- **Organisation responsible:** DG ECHO
- **Short description:** Requirements regarding water-trucking are listed on page 56.
- **Accessibility:** English

Technical Brief: Water trucking in drought emergencies

- **Organisation responsible:** Oxfam
- **Short description:** Guidance on the delivery of emergency water trucking services specifically in contexts affected by drought.
- **Accessibility:** English

Compendium of Water Supply Technologies in Emergencies, 1st Edition

- **Organisations responsible:** German WASH Network, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, Global WASH Cluster, Sustainable Sanitation Alliance.
- **Short description:** A practical reference and planning guide that supports decision-making on appropriate water supply technologies across all phases of humanitarian emergencies.
- **Accessibility:** English

Rehabilitating water infrastructure, ICRC – Gaza & Jordan (page 39)

- **Organisation responsible:** DG ECHO
- **Short description:** This case study illustrates how the ICRC improves long-term water access by rehabilitating existing infrastructure, strengthening local water management capacity, and prioritising preventive, sustainable approaches in complex and water-stressed crisis settings.

- **Accessibility:** [English](#) and [French](#).



PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Do not consider water trucking a “quick fix”, or something that can be continued in the medium to long term without a transition plan.
- Do not overexploit local water sources, as this can lead to depletion and make the rehabilitation or construction of water infrastructure unfeasible and unsustainable (as a longer-term alternative to water trucking).
- Avoid establishing expensive water delivery models without a clear and realistic pathway toward sustainable service delivery.
- Avoid disrupting local water markets through poorly regulated water provision. Water distribution without volume controls can lead to overconsumption or non-essential use, while prolonged free water supply may distort prices, weaken local service providers, and create dependency.
- Be mindful not to create long-term dependence on contracted water trucking companies. When providers become reliant on sustained humanitarian contracts, the sudden loss of this revenue can create tensions or disputes. Transition and exit plans should therefore be communicated early and water trucking phased out in a predictable manner.



GOOD PRACTICES

- Always develop a medium-term strategy in place for sustainable water provision.
- Consider the timeliness of water trucking as in the dry/drought season this can put additional pressure on water resources.
- Ensure water trucking interventions do not undermine existing water providers or distort local market systems.
- Work collaboratively with local and national water authorities and consult water experts to identify appropriate water sources, assess the impacts of water trucking activities, and establish clear service levels and management arrangements for water distribution
- Ensure coordination between humanitarian organisations to foster sustainable water supply, share resources where possible and to avoid duplication.
- Conduct checks at the procurement stage. As a minimum, potential water trucking suppliers should provide evidence of authorisation to extract water and confirmation of the legal status of the abstraction site, demonstrate that recharge, flow and yield rates are monitored, and confirm that water quality meets the relevant standards. Good practice is to include responsibility for monitoring water abstraction within supplier contracts and to reflect this in the project log frame.
- Where feasible, discuss ways to reduce the climate and environmental footprint of planned water trucking with suppliers. This may include confirming that optimal delivery routes have been identified to minimise trips for the same volume and ensuring that vehicles are properly maintained and serviced to reduce emissions and local air pollution.
- Where possible, support or develop initiatives that improve the infiltration of water into the soil (agroecology, Nature-based Solutions, wetland protection, etc.) as a mitigation strategy.