
Chavez urges 3-minute showers to conserve water

Leftist President Hugo Chavez called on Venezuelans to stop singing in the shower and to wash in three minutes because the oil-exporting nation is having problems supplying water and electricity.

Venezuela has suffered several serious blackouts in the past year because of rapidly growing demand and under-investment, which has been aggravated by a drop in water levels in hydroelectric dams that provide most of its energy. Chavez announced energy-saving measures and said he would create a ministry to deal with the electricity shortages, which have affected the image of his socialist revolution before legislative elections due in 2010.

Calling for water conservation, he said low rainfall caused by the El Nino weather phenomenon meant water levels were critically low in the El Guri reservoir, one of the world's largest dams.

"Some people sing in the shower, in the shower half an hour. No kids, three minutes is more than enough. I've counted, three minutes, and I don't stink," he said during a televised Cabinet meeting.

"If you are going to lie back, in the bath, with the soap and you turn on the what's it called, the Jacuzzi ... imagine that, what kind of communism is that? We're not in times of Jacuzzi," he said, to laughter from his ministers.

He mentioned using airplanes to try to force rain from clouds and said the government would soon publish a decree prohibiting imports of low-efficiency electrical appliances. He called on ministries and state-run companies to cut energy consumption by 20 percent immediately.