

Mr Deputy Mayor, Honoured guests, all protocols observed.

I've been asked to present on the impact of power cuts on business.

The fact of the matter is that we need simply look around during load shedding to see the impact. The lady who runs a small eatery can't cook her meals, the cleaning services company can't do laundry for their clients at night because there's no power for the washing machine, the restaurant that has to run a generator to keep their cold storage fresh, the hotel that has to run generators through the night to keep lights on for their guests. My business for example, has to run generators at multiple locations to keep the network live during load shedding.

The knock-on effect of running generators and procuring backup power solutions is a depletion of profits when profits are literally being burned away in diesel, gas and petrol, not to mention the maintenance costs of generators and ultimately, the cost of goods and services rising.

The business who can afford backup power are the fortunate companies. Some small businesses don't have enough profit to enable them to run backup power solutions for all instances of load shedding nor can they afford green energy solutions. In spite of tax incentives, the prohibitive costs of the capital outlay makes this an unobtainable solution for the many.

98% of businesses in South Africa are classified as "small business" and they contribute a staggering 39% to South Africa's GDP and 25% of private sector job growth. This means that one cannot ignore the importance of a small business, the very businesses who are the most vulnerable and most affected by power outages.

Some have yet to recover from the devastating impact of COVID 19. They are the lifeblood of our economy and the first affected by market fluctuations. When these businesses require investment funding to secure their future and growth they are measured by the same economic factors as their larger counterparts. The electricity crisis impacts the return on investment of a small business investment as much as it does on a large business. How is a small business supposed to grow, create job or even begin in an uncertain environment?

Only time will tell us what the long-term effect that the closure of small businesses as a result of the electricity crisis will have on our economy, we are already seeing contracted economic growth as a short-term result. Studies show that a contracting economy's impact in the long term is a greater reliance on government for financial aid which in turn leads to increased government borrowing which then leads to increased financial burdens on the state, something our state can ill afford.

I haven't shared anything today that we don't already know, the bottom line is that we're in an electricity crisis, costs are skyrocketing impacting consumer inflation and causing havoc on the country's economic growth results.

The time for urgent intervention is now, we as citizens and business leaders need to contribute to the solution through active participation in energy efficiency. We can't solve the electricity crisis for the whole country, however, we can do our bit to make a positive impact and reverse the downward spiral.

So, let's not dwell on the negative impact and cost of business and the long term results of the energy crisis, but let's look at what we as the business community of this town can do to improve the situation.

Did you know that 43% of all electricity generated globally is wasted? That's right, wasted.

It is vital for business to prioritise energy efficiency and adopt measures to save electricity. Not only does this contribute to a greener planet, but it also has a direct positive impact on the bottom line.

Take this a step further, as business leaders, we should be instilling an energy saving mindset in our employees so that they may implement these energy efficiencies not only for our business, but also in their own homes.

First and foremost, businesses should conduct energy audits to assess their current energy consumption and identify areas where electricity savings can be achieved. An energy audit evaluates the efficiency of lighting systems, heating and cooling systems, equipment and processes, providing valuable insights into potential energy-saving opportunities. By understanding where electricity is being used inefficiently, business can develop targeted strategies to reduce energy consumption.

We conducted such an audit in our business, the audit was actually nothing more than an experiment, we used a small power consumption meter that cost less than a thousand Rand.

We already knew or assumed that our equipment does not draw much power, and it really doesn't, but here's what we learned, our network pops as we call them had inverters double the size that they needed to be, what this translated to was double the batteries to power these inverters that didn't need to be as powerful as they were.

What's more, with increased cycles of load shedding and during longer outages, the batteries were reaching end of life sooner than usual needing replacement more often. The simple experiment resulted in cost savings on batteries and inverters and more energy efficiency.

Next, we turned to our offices, again, not as an audit, we were just curious. We learned that our head office uses 20Amps on lights, that's 4400W the equivalent of running a heater for the day. Needless to say, our incandescent lights are being replaced with LEDs as I stand here today. Finally, we checked the power consumption of our computer monitors and found that a third of them were drawing four times more power than the others, incidentally, these were the smallest monitors in our fleet, we simply changed the monitors and saved a further 500W of power.

The point I'm making here is that small changes can make a big difference in the greater scheme of things. We saved thousands of Watts and thousands on batteries and made a small contribution to energy efficiency.

If you have a large electricity bill of over R30 thousand per month, an energy audit cannot be conducted as a simple experiment, consider looking to companies who do energy audits.

Some of you may know Ian Schrosbee as the organiser of the Knysna Speed Festival, Speed Festival is a hobby for Ian, his actual business is IO Energy based right here in Knysna. Ian can assist any business with an in-depth energy audit to identify areas that are costing more than they're worth to run, what equipment is running inefficiently and most importantly, where your business can save on that electricity bill. You would be surprised how much money you can save by making an investment in an energy audit from IO Energy.

For small and medium businesses, take a trip to your favourite hardware store, preferably support local, purchase an inexpensive power consumption meter and measure your equipment to see where you can save electricity.

For your employees, friends and family, spread the word, we're striving to become an energy efficient town. We're heading into winter, most homes in Knysna are south facing, which, as we all know, means it's really cold in winter. Front of mind is keeping warm. Heaters are a strain on the electricity situation, fire places are great, but also cost a lot of money to run, along with gas heaters also running at high prices, electrical heaters are the cheapest to run in the short term, but consider the larger picture, what is your heater doing to increase demand on the electrical system.

There are ways to heat your home more efficiently. Older homes are not well insulated, specifically, around 40% of the heat in your home can be lost through windows and doors. Cost effective solutions to retain the heat generated by the sun during the day include plastic seals around windows and bean sausages at the bottom of the doors. Let the sunshine in during the day and close those curtains at night to keep that heat in.

Geysers are a touchy subject, many people are understandably concerned about having a cold shower or bath, however, a geyser switched off during the evening peaks or even in the morning when you leave home and on again when you return saves hours of essentially running an urn when no-one is using it. I speak from personal experience, my geyser is on for 3 hours per day and I haven't had a cold shower yet, but I do save up to 10kWh on my electricity consumption every day. Give it a try, switch your geyser off tomorrow when you leave home and on again when you return.

Cooking is another thing that is energy intensive. Consider cooking larger meals once or twice per week that need quick reheating in the evenings, yes, you'll be eating the same meal for a few days, but, you'll be doing more for the crisis.

If you are fortunate enough to have solar, let the sun do your heavy lifting, let it charge your batteries, use it to run your washing machine and iron, avoid using high energy equipment during the evening peak. Let your batteries run low overnight.

Recent news reports that the charging of batteries at the end of load shedding is contributing to an increase in power demand of 1.2GW, that's a stage of load shedding. Your batteries don't need to charge to 100% when load shedding ends, they simply need enough to last through the next bout of load shedding before the sun comes up to charge them back to full capacity.

Growing up we were under constant water restrictions for a few years due to a severe drought, our municipality launched a campaign called "Save Every Drop" This consisted not only of posters and billboards, but extended into every home and business in the city, the municipality issued small stickers that residents placed above their taps reminding them to save every drop of precious water.

I propose a "Save Every Watt" campaign. A simple yet cost effective sticker that can be placed on every light switch in every home and business in Knysna reminding residents and visitors alike that the simple act of switching off a light when multiplied by many properties can have a positive impact on the electricity crisis. Mr Tholie, it would be great if the municipality could create such an initiative.

I thank you Mr Tholie for your presentation on what the Knysna Municipality's plans.

In closing, I encourage every person here to Become an Energy Efficiency Champion, educate our children on the importance of saving electricity and water. Take every opportunity to save electricity and spread the word.

Less demand equals less load shedding.

I'd now like to introduce you to my colleague, Mr Adriaan Shipalana, the chairman of our board. Adriaan will be providing some insight into the effects of load shedding on infrastructure (i.e. theft, failure and mitigation steps taken by Erkhurleni Municipality).