

Panama seeks new sources of water for canal

September 13 2023, by Francisco JARA



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Panama is looking into new sources of water for the Panama Canal, which moves six percent of global maritime trade but recently had to restrict traffic due to drought, its operator said.

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Ricuarte Vasquez, the canal's administrator, told reporters in Panama Tuesday that "another source of (water) supply is needed to regulate Gatun Lake"—an artificial reservoir that is a key part of the 50-mile (80-kilometer) waterway inaugurated in 1914.

It is used mainly by clients from the United States, China, and Japan.

Each ship moving through the canal requires 200 million liters of freshwater to move it through an intricate system of locks, provided by two artificial lakes fed by rainfall.

The lakes also supply drinking water to half the country of about 4.2 million people.

However, Panama is facing a biting drought, made worse by the El Niño weather phenomenon, which has also forced canal administrators to restrict the waterway to ships with a maximum draft (water depth) of 13.11 meters (43 feet).

The restrictions are expected to lead to a drop in earnings of some \$200 million in 2024.



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Vasquez said one option being considered was the construction of a dam on the Indio River, west of the canal, from where water could be transferred to Gatun Lake via an eight-kilometer pipeline.

Another is to extract [water](#) from the Bayano Lake to the east, Panama's second largest after Gatun.

"Indeed there is a different weather pattern that is affecting rainfall levels," Vasquez said of the predicament.

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Tuesday, the number was down to 116.

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