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How a plastic pouch could bring clean water to millions

28 Jan 2011
 Source: [Alertnet](#) // [Emma Batha](#)



A Kenyan girl finishes a HydroPack drink. Copyright Hydration Technology Innovations, LLC

It's a plastic pouch the size of an envelope, but it could revolutionise the provision of drinking water in major disasters like quakes and floods.

At least, that's the hope of a team of water experts who are testing the filtration device in a flood-prone village in Kenya.

The idea is you immerse the bag in a puddle or stream – no matter how polluted – and 10 hours later you have a safe drink. The membrane filters out bacteria and dirt and adds in sugars and other nutrients important for rehydration.

At the moment when a disaster strikes, aid agencies and governments fly in a lot of bottled water. But this is heavy, bulky and costly to move around.

Water can make up half the weight of all relief supplies airlifted into a disaster zone, according to **Hydration Technology Innovations** (HTI) which has developed the HydroPack for use in humanitarian emergencies.

HTI's chief executive Walter Schultz said one helicopter loaded with HydroPacks could produce the same amount of water as 15 helicopters of bottled water.

For the last 10 days the inhabitants of Mudimbia village in western Kenya's Budalangi district have been using the filtration bags every day in a simulated disaster.

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The pouch holds 355 ml (12 fl oz) when full and the drink – a bit like a sports drink - is consumed directly from the bag through a straw, minimising the risk of contamination from other drinking containers. The packs, which can only be used once, come in different flavours including orange and lemony lime.

"This area of Kenya experiences frequent flooding and at any given time, 40 percent of its residents do not have access to clean water," said Catherine Mwango, executive director of the **Kenyan Water for Health Organisation** (KWAHO) which is administering the pilot project.

"If the research is proven out, the HydroPack has the potential to change the way that governments and NGOs respond in a disaster situation."

The families are being asked to report on their general health, how easy it is to use the packs and the taste.

The Red Cross, U.N. children's agency UNICEF and Kenyan government are observing the project. HTI, a U.S. company, says it will share the results with governments and aid agencies.

Schultz said the filter system removed all toxins, pollutants, heavy metals, viruses and bacteria, including those which cause cholera and other water-borne diseases which can spread quickly after a disaster.

But he said the bags were not meant to replace the big water tanks that aid agencies bring in and agreed the sugary drink was not suitable for prolonged use.

"It is for the immediate response after a disaster ... until the aid agencies are able to get there with more permanent infrastructure," he said.

"It is a sugary drink and it probably wouldn't be good to have children drinking 10 a day (long-term). But that formula and sweetness are very important when people are in those initial days of a disaster and they are stressed and don't have access to food or water."

[Click here for HTI's blog about the pilot project.](#)

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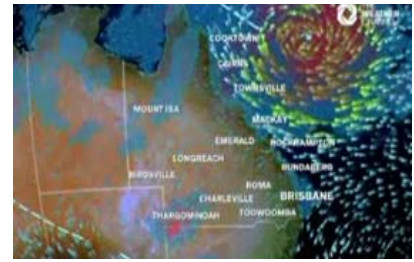
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