

Power station being used to fuel desalination plant

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An extra one million cubic metres of water may sound like the proverbial drop in the bucket, compared with Israel's overall water needs, but that is the amount to be provided over the next four months by the water desalination plant in Ashdod.

The plant, attached to the Ashdod power station, will start temporary commercial production this week, according to the Energy Ministry spokesman. The \$20 million facility was set up six years ago to be used mainly as an experimental project funded jointly by the U.S. and Israel.

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An unusual combination of circumstances led the ministry to conclude the plant could now be commercially viable. With oil now cheaper than coal, the coal-fired power plant at Hadera is being used less, while the use of oil-fired power plants, like Ashdod's is growing.

Since the Ashdod plant is now being run at night, this makes it possible to use the waste heat from the plant to desalinate water at a reasonable cost. The higher cost of water due to the drought also makes costs competitive. The ministry has agreed to sell the water at a price no higher than 30 cents a cubic metre, which is the going rate in the south.