The monsoon is here and along with it comes the opportunity of replenishing dwindling groundwater of the capital.

Delhi Jal Board has issued orders for setting up 12 rain centres to facilitate adoption of rainwater harvesting systems in the monsoon season. While eleven of these units will be located at the district level to provide guidance and technical expertise on installation of such systems, five teams will work on the central level.

A senior DJB official said that a central rain water harvesting cell has already been functional at Varunalaya, the Jal Board headquarters in Jhandewalan. “In order to educate and facilitate the public at large, district-level rain centres are being established in each revenue district. People from neighbouring areas can also seek guidance for installing RWH systems,” an official added.

In August last year, DJB had tweaked the rules to make it mandatory for all properties, with an area of 100sq metres and above, to have functional rainwater harvesting systems, with strong penal provisions for defaulters.

The compliance, however, has been way lower than expectations. While the initial deadline to create the RWH systems in houses was in March 2020, DJB officials said the Covid pandemic had forced them to consider a fresh deadline. “These eleven centres will be headed by an engineer with attending officials helping the residents with the technical know-how, information related to financial assistance and to provide details of executing agencies empaneled with the Jal Board,” an official explained.

The city receives 617mm of annual average rain and this precious resource can be used to recharge the depleting water-levels in the capital, as highlighted in a recent report submitted by the Central Ground Water Board in the apex court.

It is not that rain centres are a new concept in the city. Several years back, three centres were opened in RK Puram, Dwarka and Lajpat Nagar — which managed to do the job for a while but could not yield decent results.

Experts point out that while the policy of providing incentives and penalties encourages people to fall in line, poor enforcement has failed in delivering the original intent of these centres. Waivers, amnesties and delays in deadline for compliance are rampant.

DJB had already given relaxation of troublesome provisions like using activated charcoal as filtration medium and bore-well for making the water harvesting units. “Repeated postponement of deadlines and lax enforcement are to be blamed for the city performing poorly in ground water conservation,” an official point out.