

■ SERVICE DELIVERY

# Rubbish piles up as workers strike

*Business owners say stench is keeping away customers*

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SEVERAL areas north of Durban have rising piles of refuse bags on street corners after municipal workers embarked on an illegal strike.

The workers have been on strike since Thursday last week. Areas that have been affected include Verulam CBD, KwaMashu, Ntuzuma, and oThongathi CBD. Workers from the Cleansing and Solid Waste and Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), attached to Durban Solid Waste, downed tools and were demanding that they be permanently employed.

It was reported that six depots were closed by striking workers.

A business owner in the oThongathi CBD said the municipality should provide an alternative waste collection service rather than leave the refuse bags to pile up in the streets.

According to the business owner, for each municipal dirt bin, they pay R342 a month to the municipality for collection.

When The Mercury visited the oThongathi CBD yesterday, there were piles of refuse bags in the street and dirt bins were packed to capacity. There was also a foul odour.

Due to the heat, some of the dirt in refuse bags had started to rot and was



PILES of refuse bags lie outside businesses in the oThongathi CBD yesterday. The city's refuse collection schedule has been disrupted by an illegal strike by workers. | **LEON LESTRADE** African News Agency (ANA)

attracting flies.

"I'm selling fruit and veggies here and what is sad is that we have flies all around the shop. This is affecting the business. It's not like they're doing us a favour (to collect the rubbish), we are paying for collection," a fruit and vegetable shop owner said.

Another irate business owner said

the odour from the bins was unbearable and was putting off customers.

"When people come here, some want to relax and eat their food. But they can't because of the smell. No one would walk inside the shop, sit down and eat while there are bad smells and tons of dirt piling up in front of the business," said the business owner.

Local ward councillor in KwaMashu and Ntuzuma, Mondli Zwane, said the situation was also bad in his area.

He said residents had resorted to throwing their waste in streams.

Zwane said there had been no communication from city officials about when the strike would be over and he did not know what to tell residents.

"There's a lot of dirt lying in the roads all over the area, including in other wards in KwaMashu and Ntuzuma. At night the dogs are tearing open the plastic bags which causes the dirt to be spread all over the roads.

"We don't even know when this strike will come to an end but we hope it will be soon," said Zwane.

EThekweni Municipality spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said the situation was back to normal with regard to the illegal industrial action by EPWP workers attached to Durban Solid Waste.

Mayisela said, however, about 20% of the workers were suspected of intimidating the city's permanent employees, who were not on strike.

He confirmed that the workers embarked on a strike as they wanted to be employed permanently by the city.

"We acknowledge that areas such as KwaMashu, oThongathi, and Verulam have been affected by this illicit behaviour. We're working around the clock to clear the backlog under police escort. We're therefore appealing to the public to take out their refuse bags in accordance with their refuse schedule."

Mayisela said the city was also appealing to EPWP workers who had not gone back to work to return with immediate effect.

"The city is now considering a court interdict against anyone who will impede it from discharging its constitutional responsibilities, one of them being refuse removal.

"We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience this state of affairs has caused to our residents," he said.