



CITYWATCH

WITH SIBONISO MNGADI

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■ POLLUTION



SEWERAGE that leak into rivers have a negative impact on ecological health. eThekweni has been named as one of the most affected areas by sewage discharge due to ever-growing population.
| Bongani Mbatha

State of rivers poses health risk

THE ecological health of our rivers is in a bleak state according to the Department of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation's River EcoStatus Monitoring Programme State of Rivers Report, which found only 15% of our rivers are in a good state. The rest had been severely impacted by the continuous discharge of sewage that flows into it.

The report, which was released last month, presented results for 364 sites throughout the country.

It found that about 4% of the sites, generally located in urban areas and subjected to modified flows and habitat alteration, in addition to pollution, were in an unsustainable condition.

"River sites in densely populated areas such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London and Mthatha, have indicated poor conditions due to the lack of proper management and maintenance of sewage treatment works", the report says.

The report recommends that municipalities develop better and greener town planning and improved service delivery to fight sewage leakage.

A Facebook group, Save Our Rivers, raised concerns about the amount of water flowing into uMngeni River. The group said while eThekweni municipality was working to repair the pump stations, the volume of sewage flowing into the rivers was increasing.

City Watch has, over the past few weeks, received several complaints in this regard. Residents and business-people complained that sewage leaked either from properties or on the public roads. Complainants were concerned about the lack of response from the eThekweni Municipality, saying they were worried about the health risk.

Included among the complaints was sewage discharge flowing into the uMngeni River from the Riverside pump station. City officials had promised it would take up to two weeks to complete the repair, however, it has not been repaired.

The city has also struggled to fix a major sewer system on Bellair Road in Mayville, which has been a problem for years.

Msawakhe Mayisela, a spokesperson for the municipality, blamed the public for the vandalism and illegal connections.

Mayisela advised residents to refrain from throwing stuff that might cause blockages to the sewers.

■ NEW ENGLAND ROAD

Landfill site ablaze for 10 days

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A GOLF tournament planned by the Maritzburg Golf Club will go ahead today despite the toxic fumes emanating from the New England Road landfill site.

The waste management site, owned by the Msunduzi Municipality, was set alight last week Friday allegedly by waste pickers living on the premises.

By noon yesterday, the site was still burning.

Mark Ireland, manager at the Maritzburg Golf Club overlooking the landfill site, said while a few people had cancelled because of health concerns, the tournament would go ahead.

"It's a big KZN golfing event and all that's happening is not a good advertisement for PMB. We also need the money to keep our doors open because we are an NPO," said Ireland.

The landfill site is situated towards the bottom end of the golf course and Ireland said he was worried about the health and safety of the golfers.

He said they had reported the informal settlement when only a few shacks had been erected, which had now turned into a village.

"We reported it to the municipality when there was one shack. This has got out of hand," said Ireland.

Nomusa Dube-Ncube, MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, visited the site on Monday and was reported to have opened a criminal case against the municipality for mismanagement and non-compliance.

Among the issues Dube-Ncube raised during her site visit was that of waste pickers who work and live on the landfill. There were about 200 people living there.



THE New England Road landfill site has been ablaze for more than a week and Msunduzi Municipality is being assisted by uMgungundlovu and eThekweni municipalities as well as Working On Fire to contain the blaze.

Sipho Mtolo, 44, a waste picker, has been living in a shack behind the dump since 2010. He said he was not sure how the fire had started. He said most shackdwellers were from neighbouring informal settlements and that it was cheaper to reside within the site than to travel daily. He said the majority of waste pickers were locals, and not illegal immigrants.

Individuals who have made the dump site their home use the water from the landfill for cooking and drinking. A river nearby, which separates the shacks from the Maritzburg Golf Course, serves as a laundry area and they have pit toilets.

"Most of us have built our shacks from material we found here. It was difficult to live here in the early years, but now we are working peacefully and

can pay for cars to pick up our loads."

He said he usually made a profit of about R40 a day, but in a good week could earn R500.

"We sell our recyclables to Central Waste Paper for R3 a kilogram," he said. "I do this job because I did not have an opportunity to go to school. Without an education it's hard to live a decent life, but I am happy with where I am and what I have."

Msunduzi firefighters have battled to extinguish the flames since last week and had to request assistance and additional resources from the uMgungundlovu and eThekweni municipalities and NGO Working on Fire (WOF).

Bongani Nhlathathi, WOF KZN acting general manager, said, "We were called out to the fire on Monday, dis-

patching 34 firefighters and a division superintendent with a fire truck. We plan to assist the municipality for as long as they need us."

Rico Euripidou, an environmental health campaigner from Groundwork, said when he drove into the city on Monday he could smell the fire and see the smog from a distance.

Euripidou said the burning of waste was among the least desirable management practices globally because of dangerous potential health impacts. He said mismanagement of any landfill site, especially one with a well-past-closure date, would give rise to issues that New England Road was facing.

He said he could not blame those who were calling for the site to close, as many residents nearby were being exposed to a number of health risks.



WASTE picker Siphon Mtolo has been living in one of the shacks behind the waste dump for nine years and says the community is increasing.

He said air pollution was known to cause death through lung cancer, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, strokes, and lower respiratory infection.

Euripidou said one solution would be the adoption of a system capable of separating waste at the source while recovering valuable recyclables and organic material.

Thobeka Mafumbatha, spokesperson for Msunduzi Municipality, said progress was being made extinguishing the fire.

"An integrated approach has been adopted to find a solution. We do not want communities to be exposed to air pollution as this may cause respiratory illnesses. We are looking to employ a site manager and develop a strategy on the way forward."

■ ILLEGAL STRIKE

Refuse collection resumes tomorrow

WASTE removal is expected to resume across the city from tomorrow following an illegal strike by some Durban Solid Waste workers employed under the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Contracted workers embarked on the illegal strike leaving piles of rubbish lying in the streets. The refuse service collection and street sweeping in and around Durban were affected. Workers demanded to be permanently employed by the municipality, saying they were on contract for a long time.

Jaycee Ncanana, provincial secretary for the SA Municipal Workers Union, said although the affected workers were not members, the union



EPWP workers at the Durban Solid Waste site in Springfield. | Nqobile Mbonambi African News Agency(ANA)

had intervened on their behalf.

"It was not a strike, rather a work stoppage. They have raised some valid points about being on contract for

too long and they have seen others absorbed permanently by the municipality. We have asked them to return to work to allow the employer to look into their demands.

"There are discussions taking place, and the employer will advise us of the outcome," said Ncanana.

Msawakhe Mayisela, eThekweni municipality spokesperson said refuse would be collected by tomorrow and residents should place their bags at their collection spots.

"We would like to apologise. The municipality has obtained a court interdict against workers who embark on an illegal strike while discussions are ongoing," said Mayisela.