



Publication: Citizen, The (Daily) - Main
Title: Hazards of being at home
Publish date: 30 Sep 2022
Page: 3

Reach: 43693
AVE:R 92511.14
Author: Brian Sokutu

Hazards of being at home

JUST SURVIVING: GOVERNMENT FALLING DOWN ON ITS OBLIGATIONS TO TEMBA RESIDENTS

» Being poisoned by asbestos, stagnant groundwater and contaminated tap water.

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Brian Sokutu

For 75-year-old Temba township pensioner Daisy Motaung it never rains but it pours.

For more than four decades, Motaung has not only lived in a health-hazardous asbestos-roofed, four-roomed home, her life has turned for the worse – water flowing into her yard from a nearby underground stream has led to serious damp on the walls and huge cracks.

Motaung is among several residents in the area who have, for the past three years, been struggling to get clean drinking water. The SA Human Rights Commission in 2019 declared the water unfit for human consumption after a study by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Reflecting on her circumstances, Motaung told *The Citizen*: “This house can fall at any moment. All it will now take, are strong winds and summer rains.

“Despite having written to the Tshwane metro council and brought my situation to the attention of the Gauteng provincial government, nothing has been done.

“For some time now, government officials have been promising to come and fix my house.



“I have written to senior ANC officials, like Gwen Ramokgopa, to assist me, but they have just been making promises.

“Five other councillors to whom I reported my matter have also been unable to help.

“If you try to walk through my garden in the front, it is flooded with water, which has become stagnant,” said Motaung.

“With the situation worsening when it rains, we need a proper piping and drainage system installed as a matter of urgency.”

With her meagre government grant, Motaung has been fighting a losing battle to ward off the wa-

ter and getting her home fixed.

“I have spent my own money to hire trucks full of gravel to be off-loaded in my yard.

“For three years, we have also been ... using water that is contaminated with sewerage.

“When you boil water here, it stinks.

“It makes my stomach to run and, at the local clinic, nurses detected blood in my stools.

“To illustrate the gravity of my situation, technical people despatched here last year by [the department of] public works [and infrastructure] to replace the asbestos roof found it difficult to

carry out the work, because they found the walls unstable – a huge safety risk,” Motaung said.

“As asbestos is no longer used in roofing due to it being a health hazard, government’s technical people have tried to dismantle the roof for replacement, but failed.

“When they tried to take out the wooden frames, they found that it would be unsafe, because they would fall.

“Last year, when we experienced gale-force winds, the walls cracked badly. Fortunately, nobody was injured because it was during the day and the kids had gone to school.”



DAISY MOTAUNG. The Temba resident has been fighting for years to have her ‘broken’ home fixed. Pictures: Nigel Sibanda

Motaung’s neighbour, Margaret Lekutu, had a similar story.

“Here it is a matter of survival – cracked homes and dirty water, with the government doing absolutely nothing,” said Lekutu.

After visiting Motaung, *The Citizen* brought her plight the attention of the Gauteng department of human settlements, which promised to intervene.

Asked for comment, its spokesperson, Luzuko Pongoma, requested Motaung’s details.

Residents of Temba in Hamanskraal, on the border with North West, have been on the receiving end of state neglect, with complaints of “brownish” and “slimy” water coming out of local taps chief among their grievances.

As many South Africans go to sleep in comfort tonight, Motaung, her neighbour Lekutu and other Temba residents could be awakened by falling homes.

– brians@citizen.co.za