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‘Threat of nuclear spill on NC road looms’

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THE SPEAKER of Nama-Khoi Municipality, Rodney Krtzinger, has raised the alarm over the threat of a possible nuclear spill on the R355 road between Springbok, Gamoep and Vaalputs.

The gravel road is used to transport radioactive material from Koeberg and Pelindaba nuclear facilities to the Vaalputs Radioactive Waste Disposal Facility, which is located about 100km south-east of Springbok in the Northern Cape.

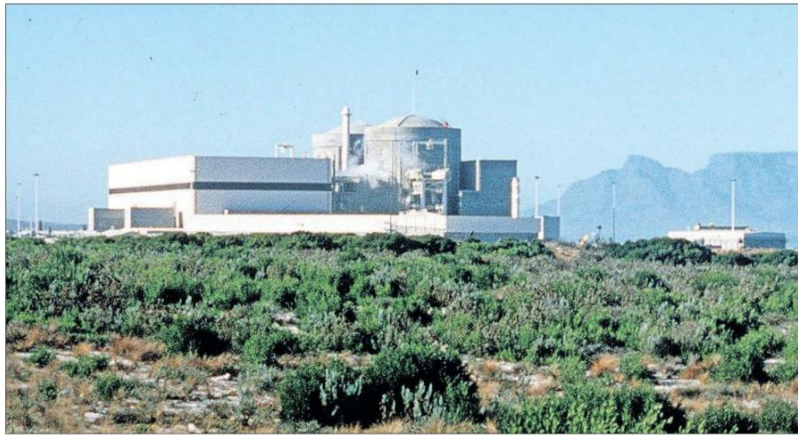
Krtzinger said the road was in urgent need of repairs.

“While farmers with 4x4s fear travelling on the treacherous gravel road that goes from Springbok to the Vaalputs Radioactive Waste Disposal Facility during daylight, lorries filled with nuclear waste are tackling this unsafe road in the dark,” said Krtzinger.

“The condition of the Vaalputs Road and the involved risks for the nuclear waste ferried on this road have been an ongoing cause for concern.”

Over 200 residents in Rooifontein and Kamassies in Namaqualand petitioned the portfolio committee on transport to upgrade the road between Springbok and Vaalputs to an asphalt surface in 2016 as it posed a danger of “terrible accidents and loss of life”.

Krtzinger said that the DA



Koeberg nuclear power station. File picture

had submitted a petition to the national Department of Transport as the road contravened international regulations in terms of the transportation of nuclear waste.

“The national Department of Transport did not refute this and supported the demands of the community for the road to be upgraded. They also committed to assist the Province to get outside funding for the upgrade of this road.

“Today, the road is in a worse condition than before and the

constant threat of a nuclear spill looms.”

Krtzinger stated that according to the provincial Department of Roads and Public Works, the “low traffic volumes” on the road did not warrant an upgrade.

“The issue at hand, however, is not road traffic volumes but rather the safe passage of nuclear waste, to prevent it from being spilt due to poor road conditions, which could have adverse consequences for the environment and members of the community.

“The provincial department is not blading the road monthly, as it previously claimed to be doing, showing complete disregard for nuclear waste safety regulations. At the same time, there is not even a warning system in place to ensure that surrounding members of the public can be quickly warned to vacate the area in the case of a nuclear spill.”

He indicated that he had requested the district departments of Roads and Public Works and Co-operative Governance, Human

Settlements and Traditional Affairs (Coghsta) to raise the matter for national intervention.

“The DA has referred the matter to the MEC for Roads and Public Works, for her urgent intervention. If the provincial government fails to respond, we will refer it back to Parliament, as it is a matter of national importance. It poses a serious risk to the greater Namaqualand community.”

The portfolio committee on transport indicated in 2016 that the road fell under the jurisdiction of the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works.

Only a very short section of the road was tarred immediately outside of Springbok.

The committee advised that road signage should be improved and that the bridges on the road that had eroded during 2012 be reconstructed urgently to enable pupils to access schools.

The committee further called for the suitability of the road to transport nuclear waste to be assessed in terms of maintenance and environmental safety.

The provincial Department of Roads and Public Works at the time indicated to the committee that the road had extremely low traffic levels, with an average of 67 vehicles on the R355, and did not qualify for road surfacing.

The Department of Roads and Public Works did not respond to media enquiries.