



Publication: Peoples Post Grassy Park - Main
Title: Project to curb shack fires
Publish date: 18 Jul 2023
Page: 1

Reach: 25000
AVE: R 76485.99
Author: Natasha Bezuidenhout

TUESDAY, 18 JULY 2023

Tel: 021 910 6500 | Email: news@peoplespost.co.za | Website: www.news24.com

@peoplespostnewspaper @ThePeoplesPost Peoples Post

Project to curb shack fires



NATASHA BEZUIDENHOUT
NATASHA.BEZUIDENHOUT@MEDIA24.COM

The City of Cape Town, in partnership with Mandoval Vermiculite Pty Ltd, has launched a pilot project to limit the spread of fires in informal settlements.

The project was launched at Overcome Heights informal settlement on Tuesday 11 July, where the first 10 structures were coated in a fire-retardant substance.

JP Smith, Mayco member for safety and security, says 300 informal structures will be coated in vermiculite over the next six months.

"The City is working hard at keeping the deaths and property destruction from informal settlements down. We don't want people to be the victim of fires where it affects their property or worse, where it causes the loss of life.

"In the last week, we again had the needless loss of life relating to informal settlement fires."

He added that the private company Mandoval Vermiculite Pty Ltd first demonstrated its product during a simulation at the Epping Fire Station in 2021.

"We have tested this at the Epping Fire Station, built a number of structures that we covered with vermiculite and the structures survive 25% longer than the structures that are not covered.

"Other structures will burn down if there is a strong wind in four or 10 minutes, collapsing and beyond redemption. With vermiculite, you

WITH VERMICULITE... THE STRUCTURES SURVIVE 25% LONGER

can put a blow torch against it and it would stand.

"The pilot project in Overcome Heights will see the company provide the funding for the product, machinery and training, while the Disaster Risk Management will fund the employment of 11 people from the local community through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)."

Smith added that Overcome Heights was chosen for the pilot project due to its high potential for large-scale fire incidents.

"This year, so far, there have been eight fires in the area. In 2022, there were 20 fires recorded and 10 in 2021."

Should this pilot project prove successful in preventing the spread of fires, it is hoped funding could be secured by Informal Settlements Management in the Human Settlements Department, either through public or private channels, to fund similar projects in other parts of the city.

According to Smith, the City has tried various methods to limit the spread of fires including smoke detectors, different types of paint, fire blankets and buckets with sand.

"All these interventions have a common problem and that is where do we find the money to extend it to 600 000 informal structures that we have to service?"



A pilot project to limit the spread of fires was launched at Overcome Heights informal settlement last week. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Jason Coleman, finance director at Erakis Investments Pty Ltd, says when applied to a structure the product Tekrok, which is a cement material mixed with vermiculite, has fire protection qualities.

"We can basically contain a fire between three and four hours in any structure and stop it from spreading anywhere else.

"The main use for Tekrok is in petrochemical facilities. In a chevron facility, all steel structures need protection and petrochemical fires typically burn from 0 to 1 000 degrees in a couple of seconds and steel melts at 600.

"So, the whole idea is that we put this 40 ml layer around the steel structure, it stops the steel from overheating and melting and the stability of the structure remains."

Coleman added the idea came about to develop a product for informal settlements.

"We started thinking what if we developed a product where we can cover informal settlements and informal structures and have the same idea that is behind petrochemical facilities.

"We developed this product and can spray it on, a little bit thinner

which you would typically do in a petrochemical plant, and it provides that same level of protection to stop the fires from spreading."

The cost to cover just one structure, depending on its size, however, ranges from R4 000 to R6 000.

"By no means is it the cheapest but we are looking at developing beyond that. We are calling on other corporates to donate maybe raw material into the product or a single purchase of it, to come on board and be a part of this project and help communities protect themselves from fire."