

**Publication:** Saturday Star - Main

**Title:** Over 400 Eastern Cape schools still rely on pit toilets

**Publish date:** 15 Feb 2025

**Page:** 4

**Reach:** 8263

**AVE:** R 31568.99

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SAFETY

# Over 400 Eastern Cape schools still rely on pit toilets

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MORE than 400 schools in the Eastern Cape still use pit toilets, while Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines fail to accommodate the needs of learners and expose them to significant safety risks.

An investigation by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) found that traditional pit toilets remain a grim reality in 427 schools in the province, while VIP latrines often fail to meet the safety needs of learners.

The SAHRC said this dual failure continues to put the lives and dignity of South Africa's youngest learners at risk.

The investigation was launched to look into the conditions of sanitation facilities in foundation phase schools in the Eastern Cape.

The province recently recorded the deaths of three children due to unsafe sanitation facilities, one at a traditional pit toilet at Luna Primary School in Mbizana, and two at VIP toilets at Mgwagule Primary School in Vaalbank and Little Champions Daycare in Mdantsane.

The commission said while the Sanitation Appropriate For Education (SAFE) programme has replaced many traditional pit toilets, these replacements were frequently non-compliant with critical and safety standards outlined in the 2016 Water Research Commission (WRC) guidelines.

Features such as smaller pedestals, protective handles, offset pits, and reinforced structures, specifically recommended to ensure the safety of young children, are glaringly absent in many VIP installations.

The SAHRC said this oversight has resulted in VIPs posing risks similar to the facilities they were meant to replace, eroding public trust in the state's commitment to eradicating unsafe sanitation.

Department of Basic Education (DBE) spokesperson, Elijah Mhlanga, said the department was studying the report and would provide a detailed response in the next few days.

"Data submitted by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE) in 2018 revealed that 1 598 schools across the province were still reliant on pit latrine," the SAHRC report read.

"This figure, submitted to the Presidency and DBE, spurred the establishment of the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) programme.

"Despite this initiative, 427 schools in the Eastern Cape alone continue to rely on unsafe and degrading pit toilets," the report stated.

Asked if there would be enough money to improve the infrastructure, Department of Public Works and Infrastructure ministerial spokesperson, James de Villiers, said the national department was not responsible for school infrastructure, adding that questions should be directed to the relevant provincial department.

Spokesperson for the Eastern Cape Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, Vuyani Nkasiyi, said questions should be sent to DBE.



THE South African Human Rights Commission report found that 427 schools in the Eastern Cape are still using traditional pit toilets while Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines failed to meet safety needs. | DUMISANI DUBE  
Independent Newspapers