

Waste: Newspaper Articles

Landfill Sites 'Will Reach Capacity in Five Years' NOWHERE TO PUT THE RUBBISH IN 2010

Wendell Roelf – Sapa
Cape Times – Friday, August 26, 2005

Cape Town faces a filthy future as the city's six major landfill sites are expected to reach their capacity in the next five years.

"We have a serious crisis. Imagine what the city will look like in 2010, when refuse trucks collect dirt and have nowhere to put it," said Saliem Haider, acting head of disposal in the City's Solid Waste Department.

Of the six landfill sites, at Coastal Park, Vissershok, Bellville, Faure, Brackenfell and Swartklip, two have already been shut down.

After the closure of Swartklip and Brackenfell, hundreds of thousands of tons of waste have been transferred to the remaining sites, considerably shortening their lifespan.

For example, Coastal Park has a recommended lifespan of 15 years and Vissershok six years without a proposed northern extension. But now, with Faure expected to close next year, their lifespan will reduce to five years each.

The city was conducting at least 13 specialist studies, which include the impact of air and ground-water pollution and infrastructure accessibility, on two sites for a proposed regional landfill site – one at Kalbaskraal and another South of Atlantis.

"These sites will only become operational at the earliest in 2011, which means that in 2010 the city won't have an inch of legal space to put its waste," said Haider. He said the city needed to buy at least 500ha of land for the new regional site, which would operate for a minimum of 30 years. Compounding the precarious situation was the possible closure in September 2006 of the Bellville South Landfill Site.

The City had successfully appealed against a provincial decision two years ago supporting the closure, but now needed clarity on the way forwarded from environment MEC Tasneem Essop, whose spokeswoman Lynnette Johns said Essop would visit the site next week.

The Bellville South site has also been proposed for a pilot methane extraction project in which methane will be taken from the landfill and sold as carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce harmful emissions and provide an alternative energy source to surrounding industries.

Haider said profits from a successful project – studies show success is likely – could help pay for the rehabilitation of the landfill site, estimated to cost about R75 million.

The community has campaigned for the site's closure, which besides being an eyesore was also said to have increased health problems in the area.

Haider said the city was against the closure because of the knock-on effect on the Bellville site. He said Cape Town was on average dealing with a 6% annual increase in waste, despite minimisation attempts.

Smoke From Burning Tyres Pumps Dioxins Into Air

Melanie Gosling – Environment Writer
Cape Times – 26 August 1999

The uncontrolled burning of scrap vehicle tyres around Cape Town is pumping toxins into the air, including cancer-causing dioxins and pollutants which can cause genetic mutations and birth defects.

Black smoke from the tyres, set alight by people who recover and sell the handful of scrap metal left behind after burning, is 13 000 times more toxic than emissions from a coal-fired power plant, according to research done by the US Environmental Protection Agency. The pollutants disperse over long distances, meaning Capetonians are exposed to them beyond the spot where the tyres were burned.

The liquids and solids left behind after the tyres have been burnt can pollute the soil, surface water and ground water, and it's possible that the pollutants can settle on pasture, food crops and in water, and accumulate in animal tissues, including meat, fish and eggs.

Humans, at the top of the food chain, are the ultimate reservoirs for these pollutants.

Although burning tyres is illegal, the authorities seem powerless to stamp out the practice, which is particularly widespread in Cape Town's poorer areas where recovering the scrap metal in the tyres is a way of earning cash.

Residents in Philippi say some tyre-burning is run as "well organised operations", like the one next to the City Council's Cleansing Branch in Philippi where large stockpiles of tyres are kept and burned periodically. The metal that is left behind is sold to a nearby scrap dealer, they say.

Now some residents have had enough, and through the Legal Resources Centre, have called on the authorities to take action.

Angela Andrews, from the Legal Resources Centre, has written to the City Council on behalf of the South African National Civics Association, the Mitchells Plain RDP Forum and the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, outlining the health risks and uncontrolled tyre-burning and calling for a meeting to discuss how to deal with the issue.

"This has a much wider effect on Cape Town than people realise." Dioxins are known to cause cancer from very small amounts.

"In Europe and the US the public know all about dioxins and are scared of them. Here they're being boiled up right under our noses and no one seems to worry much," Andrews said.

Hans Linde, head of the Cape Metropolitan Council's air pollution control, said yesterday: "We're very, very concerned about the tyre-burning problem, and we're trying our utmost to get a more environmentally-friendly way of disposing of scrap tyres. We've been pushing government and they've started a process, but it's not been as rapid as we would have liked."

Linde said one of the problems of policing tyre burning was trying to get landowners to control tyres coming on to their land. It is illegal to dump tyres anywhere except at a hazardous waste disposal site.

"In the informal areas we have 14 of 15 landowners and we've tried to get them to control tyres on their land, but no one is accepting responsibility," he said.

He said a committee had been formed under the Department of Environment Affairs to look at acceptable disposal of tyres. One proposal was to set a levy on tyres, which the consumer would pay on purchase, and which would be used to finance an environmentally acceptable method of disposal.

Power Cuts Set Off Eco Disaster

John Yeld – Environment Writer
Cape Argus – 27 February 2006

THE POWER failures that brought the city to a standstill last week caused millions of litres of raw sewage to pour into wetland nature reserves such as Zandvlei and Zeekoevlei, creating an ecological disaster.

Recreational groups using the vleis have been warned of a health hazard and told to stay out of the water.

The spills resulted when electricity to the city's 393 sewerage pump stations was cut, causing several of them to overflow into the stormwater system that in turn leads into the rivers vleis and wetlands of the southern Peninsula.

City officials, whom confirm that they have no idea how much sewage was actually spilled, have taken emergency measures that include constructing a temporary weir in the Sand River canal flowing into Zandvlei, to block as much sewage sludge as possible, and lacing the watercourses with a biological agent designed to help break down the sewage as quickly as possible.

While this "bio-augmentation" programme starts working immediately, it could take two or three weeks to be fully effective.

And it will not help the long-term problem of nutrient loadings of the affected water ecosystem, which can only be repaired by extensive and expensive- dredging.

Before this new sewage spill Zeekoevlei, probably the most important freshwater recreational area in the city was already facing a R70 million price tag on dredging to help restore its water.

Now deeply concerned conservationists want the city's decision makers to make firm funding commitments to sort out the mess.

Although Rondevlei nature reserve has been largely spared, because of its inflow has first gone through Princess Vlei, Zandvlei nature reserve has been especially hard hit.

Zandvlei is the one of only a tiny handful of fully functioning estuaries left in the metropolitan area with relatively good water quality and is an important nursery area for many fish species.

But on Friday, conservation officials were already scooping up hundreds of dead fish in the Sand River canal, and had ordered

2 000 sandbags to construct more temporary weirs in canals feeding the vleis.

Yesterday a bulldozer was used in an attempt to open the mouth of Zandvlei at Muizenberg to help flush the sewage from the system, but the neap tide was making it difficult to dredge a channel to the sea.

Marina Da Gama resident sue Harwood, who lives close to Sea Point where the Sand River canal enters

City Should Be Held In Contempt of Court, Says Residents

VISSERSHOK WASTE SITE

Anèl Powell

Cape Times – 13 January 2006

The City of Cape Town may be held in contempt of court for failing to run the Vissershok solid waste site in Compliance with permit regulations.

In an application filed with the Cape High Court, Paul Hoffman, who lives in Morning Star on the northern border of the dump, has asked that the City of Cape Town be found in contempt of a temporary order granted by Justice Dennis Davis on December 15.

Judge Davis, who had heard evidence by Hoffman and other people living near the dump, ordered the City Council to take steps to improve conditions at the site.

Measures prescribed included the erection of boundary fences to prevent hungry scavengers from combing the waste at the site, the appointment of staff to manage and run the dump, and the implementation of a strategy to minimise smells, dust and flies.

The council has until March 15 to give reasons why this order should not be made final.

Hoffman said Judge Davis had given the council seven days in which to take action.

But the stench from the site a few days later was "horrific", Hoffman said.

The smell was unpleasant that he had contacted the city's air pollution control officer, Ossie Oswald, who visited the site on December 29.

Oswald confirmed that, when he made his inspection, conditions at the site were unsatisfactory. He took photographs, including one of someone up his elbows in the mud and waste of an uncovered trench, and submitted a report to the council.

"Since then they have put in more security," he said.

Of the pollution, made worse by the summer heat and wind Oswald said: "The city is doing quite a bit to water down the walkways to reduce dust."

The biggest problem was the health risk faced by "scavengers" who sifted through the site and ate contaminated food, Oswald said. More security would help counter this.

The security assigned to the site was inadequate and little had changed since the court order, Hoffman said.

He said the "retrieval of unsound foodstuffs" from the site's trenches continued and holes in the fence remained.

In papers he said: "By intentionally failing to timeously take the necessary action to bring about the (required) state of affairs at the facility... the city has in effect refused to comply with the order."

Saliem Haider, of the council's waste disposal management, commented yesterday: "We have looked at all the issues and addressed most of them, although the opposing parties do not agree."

Haider said he had asked the site staff for a full list of issues and that most of these had been addressed.

He had also asked the Department of Water Affairs for an independent assessment of Vissershok and it had said the council was "making significant strides" in upgrading the site.

"We have not brushed aside (the complainants) concerns and we are taking the matter seriously," Haider said.

The daily operational aspects had been sorted out, litter reduced and fence lines erected he said.

Haider acknowledged security was a problem, but said measures were being taken to limit access to the site.

The city was appointing a manager for the site.

"But we will not be able to tackle everything in one go."