



# Community News

Newsletter of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

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## Engen – No.1 Polluter (for 50 years)

On Thursday 4th March 2004 at 12:45pm learners and educators at the Settlers Primary School, Merebank, and local residents were gassed out yet **again**. This occurred after a huge toxic release from the **Engen Refinery**, from all stacks. The flare was visible from 10 kilometers away. Complaints were logged at the eThekweni Emergency Services as well as the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance offices.

In total, at least 24 people were treated and six were sent to hospital for further tests. This resulted in a high absenteeism rate the next day (140 learners, as well as 7 educators).

This incident has increased the poor health of our community.

Research has shown that at the Settlers Primary School, 52% of the learners and educators are affected with asthma (The Settlers Primary School Health Study-2002).

This recent incident is just another one of many the community has had to endure over the years. Engen has contributed to local development through pipeline leaks, spills, explosions, expansion and excessive flaring.

At a recent workshop with local educators in the South Durban Basin, there was a suggestion from the group that educators should stand firm together and not accept Industry's money. Whether this happens or not remains to be seen. What is clear is that the community is under attack.

SDCEA chairperson, Des D'Sa states: "Minister Moosa, **NOW is the time for the Green Scorpions to put their sting into the pollution WAR! The community is tired of being canon fodder for local industry for the last 50 years.**"



Learners from Settlers receiving treatment

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This is your newsletter. Please drop your stories at the SDCEA offices. John Dunn House, corner of Austerville Drive and Gouritz Roads, Wentworth. Fax: 468 1257

# Just look at some of SDCEA's many successes.....

- 1998 – Through the writing of a position paper, *The Future of the Past*, SDCEA was **able to stop mass relocations in the area**. This was a response to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which called for all residential areas in South Durban to be industrialized.
- **International links** have been built up since the inception of SDCEA in 1996 to challenge Environmental Racism, Environmental Justice and Environmental Health.
- Environmental awareness has improved through the launching of the Comparative Study on Oil Refineries in Denmark and South Durban.
- The installation of **Geographic Information System (GIS)** in the SDCEA office. This captures all community pollution complaints. It has now forced local and provincial government to install a similar system. This also produces Pollution Maps, which have been given to local schools.
- A **Toxic Tour** brochure has been produced, and this has resulted in many tours, which educates international visitors and learners alike.
- The **Bucket Brigade** takes independent air samples, when we are called out by local communities. This sample is not tainted by local government or industry, and informs communities what is in the air that they are breathing, and gives a wider range of chemical
  - SDCEA has become a **one stop knowledge shop**, for students, academics and learners. We distribute information on a range of environmental topics, free of charge.
- We produce a **newsletter** every three months, which is distributed locally and internationally.
- SDCEA also organizes a number of **workshops, seminars, public meetings** which contributes towards public participation, education and mandates for action. We also give a number of presentations to diverse forums.
- Our organisation also plans **legal protests**, and challenges government (all 3 levels) on the high levels of pollution, to give effect to our constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment. Section 24 (a).
- SDCEA has along with groundWork, and Friends of the Earth International, confronted Shell International about the incidents, accidents and high level of pollution from their refinery in Durban. This has got **international NGO collaboration**, as well as international media attention. Some of the books written about Shell

include information about SAPREF, this Information was contributed by SDCEA.

- These include *Riding the Dragon* by well known American author, Jack Doyle as well as *Leaking Pipelines – a book about Shell in South Africa. Shell – Failing the Challenge* was presented at the Shell AGM 2003.
- SDCEA achieved **NPO** (Non Profit Organisation) status in 2003.
- SDCEA has contributed to **hundreds of EIAs** (Environmental Impact Assessments) by providing information and technical assistance to local communities to challenge 'dirty' expansion programmes. This has resulted in some companies changing to cleaner fuels and technology.
- The recent publication called *Applied Meteorology and Climatology in South Durban*. This is aimed at educators and learners to inform and enlighten them about pollution issues and how relevant they are to our daily lives.
- Through SDCEAs' participation in the Multi-Point Plan, the following has been achieved:

There has been a broad **Health Study** in South Durban Communities, which is being implemented at present under the auspices of the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine with international collaboration from the University of Michigan.

There has been the **installation of 14 monitoring stations** in the area, along with two meteorological stations. This was done in conjunction with NILU and eThekweni Municipality.



**SDCEA staff receiving recognition from Norwegian Environmental Ministry**

# SDCEA'S NEW BOOK EXCITES EDUCATORS!

SDCEA'S latest success comes in the form of a text book, written in consultation with local teachers. It came into being as a result of many workshops, where educators decided that it would be extremely useful for SDCEA to write a book on local air pollution, so that it fits in with grades 10 -12 curriculum.

This has been achieved. SDCEA has had the privilege of attending workshops with grade 11 educators. The department of education has been very involved, and very supportive. "I support this book as uses fresh material", said Shirley Moodley, Head of Geography. "This book makes us think and can add value to our classes."

Njoya Silas Ngetar has researched and written the book on behalf of SDCEA. It reinforces one strategy that SDCEA uses to fight for clean air, to educate learners, our future leaders.

Other educators feel that having one book is not enough. "I would like 140 of these books in my class," said a local teacher, "..then it will be a real resource!"

Another teacher added: "My learners will feel so special having a book about their own area. It makes geography a lot more meaningful."

This book also demonstrates how local communities can make an impact on education.

SDCEA will strive to get this book accepted nationally. Watch the press for further details.

## *New Enviro Club at Lamontville High School*

On the 11<sup>th</sup> March, the Lamontville High School in Lamontville launched the Language & Environmental Society. The drive behind this initiative arises out of the need to develop language skills and environmental awareness amongst learners and the local community. Ms Farida Khan, from SDCEA spoke at the opening, and made a public declaration of SDCEA's commitment to assist and help educate the learners on air pollution matters.

Learners at the school witness both the effects of air and water pollution, both in the community and at the school. A number of learners suffer from asthma and other diseases aggravated by pollutants in the air.

By starting this society, learners take upon themselves the task to mobilize fellow learners and the community to keep the environment clean and pollution free. This group also supports the Campaign in the Lamontville Community, to keep Lamontville clean. Ms Thabisile Nkukhu requested the support from the local community to help the learners to achieve their goals during the launch.

**For further information please contact Mr. Nale, Deputy Head on 031-462 6245**

# ***An Update from the SDCEA Chair.....***

SDCEA'S Chairperson, Desmond D'Sa has been busy as always. In the last few months he's been to Gauteng (Seminar on Corporate Accountability and Environmental Justice in South Africa), Cape Town Air Quality Bill Hearings for the Environmental Portfolio Committee, as well as presenting a paper at the World Environmental Health Congress.

One of the highlights of the few months was the Community Health Conference in Wentworth, hosted by groundWork and SDCEA. This brought communities in Richards Bay, Sasolburg, Secunda and Tableview together with local residents in South Durban. International environmental health practitioners, including Professor Orris, from Cook County Hospital in Chicago (USA), Prof Stuart Batterman from University of Michigan, USA, Prof Neil White from the Cape Town Lung Institute and Dr Rajen Naidoo of Nelson Mandela Medical School. Lecturers Mike van der Merwe and Joy Kistnasamy of the Durban Institute of Technology were also there.

These academics all gave their preview of their papers that they were presenting at the World Environmental Health Congress. Our communities and learners from the Settlers Primary School in Merebank gave testimonies of their health being affected by pollution over the years.

The highlight of this gathering was a protest outside the International Convention Centre (ICC) on the Monday, at the start of the World Environmental Health Congress in Durban. Protesters handed a memorandum of all resolutions that were adopted at the community gathering over the weekend, being presented to Minister Valli Moosa, of the Department of Environment and Tourism. Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala Msimang was also present. Both ministers praised SDCEA and groundWork for putting the spotlight on several pollution hotspots around the country, but in particular, South Durban. Minister Moosa also said that the groups who are often critical of government should be supported and encouraged.

***He also mentioned "that environmental issues could not be shelved for the sake of economic expansion.***



The picture above shows SDCEA chairperson, Desmond D'Sa with members of the community at a protest outside the ICC in Durban, at the opening of the World Health Conference. "We don't want no cancer, we don't want no Asthma" was the chant of the day.

# Mondi – Friend or Foe?

It is common knowledge in the south Durban Basin that Mondi spews nine tons of Sulphur Dioxide into the air. The South Durban community is now in a unique position to change this. There are two ways that this can happen; one option is to sign an agreement with Mondi. The other is to continue to lobby the local community and collect signatures, and try to stop the process by public demand. However, there is a question whether this will have its desired affect.

The SDCEA (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance) and the Legal Resource Centre (LRC) appealed the decision on the **70 ton boiler**. LRC took on the appeal as Mondi did not do a full EIA, which was a problem and unlawful. These high emission levels from the Mondi plant would have continued unacceptable air quality in the SDB. It became apparent that an oral exemption had been granted. This exemption was taken on Judicial Review to the High Court in 2003, and Judge Hugo ruled in SDCEA's favour.

Following this appeal, Mondi sought to draw up a without prejudice contract with SDCEA that would reduce SO<sub>2</sub> levels by 66%. This is the crux of the agreement, **and it is up to the community to decide whether SDCEA signs this agreement or not.**

There are advantages and disadvantages to signing this document.

## The advantages are as follows:

- This could set an important precedent in terms of setting high air quality standards (our current and proposed legislation is very weak)
- This would ensure the reduction of SO<sub>2</sub> by 66% (i.e. less pollution)
- If this settlement is accepted it would lay the basis for the regulation of any other proposed burner of waste material, as being the best available technology, and most stringent emission standards.
- The agreement makes provision for dioxins to be tested in accordance with the USEPA protocol. The samples would be sent to a facility overseas to test if no such facilities exist in SA.

By:

Karen Read

SDCEA Project Officer

- The agreement makes provision for the testing to be audited by experts of SDCEA's choice, but paid for by Mondi (this meets one of the consistent demands made by SDCEA in EIAs, namely that the applicants should pay for an expert of the community's choice to advise the community on technical issues);
- The agreement is binding and legally enforceable in the event that Mondi breaches it. (This means that if Mondi is in breach of this contract, the community can take them to court).

## Disadvantages include:

- If Mondi gets authorisation without this agreement, the authorisation might not have these stringent standards put in it by the authorities. This means that other proponents of waste burning technology would only have to comply with our current fairly lax standards for incinerators.
- Current air pollution standards are weak.
- This could open the door for other incinerators in South Africa.
- This could jeopardise our relationship with international organisations.
- Increased dioxin and furans **may** be released into the air. These are not monitored in SA at the moment.
- Increased coal usage.
- Increased transport on roads due to raw materials.

It is in the hands of the community to make the final decision. At the historic meeting at Settlers School, on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, this important decision will be made.



Community living on the Fenceline of Mondi

# TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT HOW SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMMUNITY'S ARE BEING SLOWLY KILLED BY POLLUTING INDUSTRIES



*The Poorest of Residents are the most AFFECTED.*

Community Campaigners from South Durban, Richards Bay, Sasolburg, Secunda, Table View, Boipatong and groundWork met in Cape Town to mobilize and lobby for our rights for Environmental Justice. These campaigners called on **OUR** government to protect our health and Environment and not the BIG polluting industries. This protest took place outside the Caltex refinery in Cape Town to raise awareness about the proposed Air Quality Management Bill. For the poor Communities on the fenceline of these polluting industries, health has become worse over the past year and our government has failed to protect the community.

***We are all entitled to an Environment that is not harmful to our health or well-being - Section 24(a) of the Bill of Rights***

Members of all the above mentioned organisations made presentations to the Portfolio Committee in Parliament as to why the Air Quality Bill should not be passed. Community representatives felt that the Bill had too many loopholes and was not pro-community.

They have called on **OUR** Government to hold big polluting industries accountable for the deaths and illnesses of our people in South Africa. The number of incidents and accidents, spills and pipeline leaks in our community exposes the need for corporate accountability and stringent pollution policies and laws.

The Bill was not passed in Parliament and will be reviewed at a later stage. This has been a temporary but not totally satisfying **VICTORY** for the poor communities as we all know that industry puts profits before communities HEALTH and the Government appear to be concerned about the growth of the economy of SA, regardless of pollution or adverse health effects.

We welcome economic growth in South Africa BUT not through DIRTY Industries. **Aluta Continua!**

By:

***Steven Van Wyk***

**Air Quality Monitoring Co-ordinator  
& SD Community Campaigns Committee**

# HI KIDS!

Since our last Newsletter, you have had a long holiday. I hope you are all well. Remember, if you want good results at school or anything you do in your life **YOU** have to work hard.

Below are the solutions of the last crossword puzzle & a brief report on Air Pollution and the different types of gases you need to be aware of.

**Breathing clean air helps us stay HEALTHY.**

**"When everybody does their part, it all adds up to cleaner air."**

<b>Kids, remember this:</b>	
Learning	} L U C K
Under	
Correct	
Knowledge	

## ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD PUZZLE:

### Clues Across:

- CLIMATE change.
- Something you can ride instead of a car - **BIKE**
- Plant a TREE.
- This means the study of weather - METEOROLOGY
- FOSSIL fuel.
- The SUN provides heat & light.
- You can RECYCLE your glass bottles.

### Where do toxic air pollutants come from?

Air pollution is a problem for all of us. The average person breathes about 3,400 gallons of air a day. Children are at greater risk because they are more active outdoors and their lungs are still developing. The elderly are also more sensitive to air pollution because they often have heart or lung disease. Although most air toxics originate from human-made sources, including mobile sources (e.g., cars, trucks, buses) and stationary sources (e.g., factories, refineries, power plants), as well as indoor sources (e.g., some building materials and cleaning solvents).

### What are the health and environmental effects of toxic air pollutants?

People exposed to toxic air pollutants at sufficient concentrations and durations may have an increased chance of getting cancer or experiencing other serious health effects. These health effects can include damage to the immune system, as well as neurological, reproductive (e.g., reduced fertility), developmental, respiratory and other health problems. Once toxic air pollutants enter the body, some persistent toxic air pollutants accumulate in body tissues. Predators typically accumulate even greater pollutant concentrations than their contaminated prey. As a result, people and other animals at the top of the food chain that eat contaminated fish or meat are exposed to concentrations that are much higher than the concentrations in the water, air, or soil.



I hope you enjoyed this edition of the Kids Column.  
So long.....Regards. Farida Khan (Administrator)

### Clues Down:

- Part of the climate system - ATMOSPHERE
- Solar is one type - ENERGY
- A fossil fuel made - OIL
- A type of gas - GREENHOUSE
- Used for fuel; comes from Fossils - COAL
- Greenhouse - GAS
- ICE age.
- SOLAR energy comes from the sun.

### What are toxic air pollutants?

Toxic air pollutants, also known as hazardous air pollutants, are those pollutants that are known or suspected to cause cancer, Asthma or other serious health effects, such as reproductive effects or birth defects, or adverse environmental effects. Examples of toxic air pollutants include benzene, dioxins, toluene, sulphur dioxide and metals such as lead compounds.

### What do Toxic Air Pollutants smell like?

<b>Benzene</b>	Sweet smell
<b>Sulphur Dioxide(SO<sub>2</sub>)</b>	Pungent. Irritating
<b>Acrylonitrile</b>	Onion / Garlic / Pungent
<b>Ammonia</b>	Sharp, Pungent
<b>Chlorine</b>	Pungent / Suffocating
<b>Hydrogen Sulphide</b>	Rotten Eggs
<b>Vinyl Acetate</b>	Sweet Fruity
<b>Toluene / Xylene / Ethyl Alcohol</b>	Sweet

**Polluting Industries releasing toxins into the AIR**



### How are people exposed to toxics?

People are exposed to toxic air pollutants in many ways that can pose health risks, such as by: Breathing contaminated air & eating contaminated food products, and vegetables grown in contaminated soil.

# NGO co-operation between Denmark and south Durban – has that added any value for the environment in south Durban?

Danmarks Naturfredningsforening (DN) has been working with SDCEA for the last 4 years. The last two years of work has given great results in the valley. The DN-SDCEA project has helped SDCEA focus and work **strategically** with environmental issues related to refinery production. The work that we have done has certainly given great attention to the pollution problems and has also given us recognition from a broad range of stakeholders.

The co-operation has come about with funding from the Danish Ministries for the Environment and Foreign Affairs. The funding has enabled us to have ongoing close contact and work together on **technically difficult issues** with expertise from both Denmark and Durban.

DN international co-operation is very important and useful e.g. **in exchanging NGO knowledge** on Best Available Technology, it is essential that BAT is transferred and used in all countries that have similar productions. NGOs can play a role in achieving that aim.

It is important that NGOs have **networks** both **nationally** and **internationally** in order to support that. In our co-operation, DN has helped develop a **knowledge base** within SDCEA to give support to the future work on reducing air pollution impacts in the area. This work has helped SDCEA to focus and strategize their work and thereby get more influence in different forums.

We live in a world with great influence from big multinational companies. In order to be able to compete with these, it is vital for the NGOs that not only campaigns are being arranged and followed through, but that the more technical discussions and the **data** being distributed are being seriously received and worked with and answered back in the same manner.

This is an enormous challenge for a small NGO with relatively small resources and therefore this **international co-operation** has been vital for the SDCEA.

In Denmark, we have a long history of environmental legislation and had our first Environmental Management Act in 1972, followed in 1974 with legislation on how to **control and reduce pollution** from industrial plants.

This 30-year long tradition of control and permitting of industry can be kind of a sleeping pill for environmental NGOs because you see less and less sites with major environmental problems.

Last year the whole system of industrial environmental permits were being **revised and “modernised”** in Denmark. The government wanted to get rid of all, what they saw as unnecessary and bureaucratic procedures in applying and getting an environmental permit and in the following inspections by the authorities. The aim was only to make it easier for the industries but not for the authorities.

DN was, as the only NGO, invited to sit on the ministerial committee. **Our experience from working with Danish permits for 20 years but also the experiences from industrial pollution control (or lack of it!) in south Durban was being used in that work.**

I urge all interested parties that want to know more about our co-operation and see some results of the work to go to the SDCEA offices and get a copy of the **“2002 Snapshot - Comparison of Refineries in Denmark and south Durban”**. This report gives you a base to know more about refinery pollution and you will also give you an insight on how environmental legislation differs around the world. **With more knowledge you can help putting pressure on the local and national politicians to create laws and by-laws that can control and reduce the industrial pollution in South Africa.**



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SDCEA-DN Local Action Project 2004 -2005