

LONI PRINSLOO

STEEL giant ArcelorMittal South Africa (Amsa) will not release its "master plan" to communities affected by pollution from its massive steel-making plant in Vanderbijlpark, about 60km outside Johannesburg.

Communities have been asking for the mysterious plan for over a decade.

The courts finally ordered Amsa to hand over the 9 000-page document, but company spokesman Themba Hlegani said it would appeal.

The plan was drawn up in 2002 as a 20-year blueprint to clean up the area,

ArcelorMittal digs in heels on pollution

Group to contest court order to hand over master plan

after the company was bombarded with environmental complaints and lawsuits.

Judge Paul Carstensen ordered this month that the plan be handed over to the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (Veja).

Community representative Sam-

son Mokoena expected delivery by Tuesday.

But the case goes beyond a simple environmental battle: the judgment sets a principle whereby activists and others could gain access to strategic documents of large corporations. It might be on this basis that Amsa

decided to appeal the judgment.

Amsa also claimed that the plan, which remained in draft form for all these years, was outdated and irrelevant due to new environmental laws implemented over the years.

Its court papers say the plan had almost entirely been replaced by a number of other documents including an Emission Reduction Strategy, a Ground Water Management Study and Storm Water Management Study, among others.

Veja's lawyer, Robyn Hugo of the Centre for Environmental Rights, dismissed the claim that the plan was irrelevant, saying Amsa had relied on it in its dealings with shareholders and stakeholders alike, made numerous references to it in its annual reports over the years, and even used it to obtain certain environmental licences. She said the high court acknowledged this when it found that the master plan was indeed relevant.

"Veja was told as far back as July 2003 that the plan identified serious environmental risks. That's why Veja needs to examine it to see what were the pollution risks Amsa identified at the time, and to determine to what extent Amsa has implemented the rehabilitation measures identified in the plan," said Hugo.

Sitting in his run-down office in central Vanderbijlpark, Mokoena said at one point the steel maker had three water channels running straight from the plant into a nearby area where he still lived. "Many peo-



HIT FROM ALL SIDES: ArcelorMittal boss Lakshmi Mittal

ple got very ill and we have the right to see what the company has done from that time. We don't know why they want to keep it a secret."

Hlegani said anyone interested in its environmental plans should visit its website where a comprehensive environmental report is published as part of its annual report every year.

In the past six years, Amsa spent R1.2-billion on environmental management, of which R800-million was spent at its Vanderbijlpark plant. It spent R150-million on environmental issues at the plant this year.

Meanwhile, the larger ArcelorMittal group, controlled by billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, also picked up trouble with French courts this week.

The Luxembourg-based company, which is today valued at €18-billion (about R242-billion), is being investigated in French courts over claims of alleged criminal conduct relating to Mittal Steel's €26-billion acquisition of rival Arcelor in 2006.

No charges have yet been brought.

