

ArcelorMittal wants houses demolished

Multimillion rand lawsuit against Local Government

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THE GAUTENG Department of Local Government and Housing faces a multimillion-rand lawsuit if it fails to demolish 28 new RDP houses allegedly built on ArcelorMittal SA land.

The iron-and-steel giant company has filed papers in the Johannesburg High Court, asking it to order the Housing Department and Emfuleni Municipality, which constructed the houses, to demolish them with immediate effect.

These houses are built along the railway line that Spoornet uses to transport raw material such as iron ore from mines situated in Northern Cape to ArcelorMittal. The company warned the government that if a train derailed in the area, it would have catastrophic consequences for people living there.

ArcelorMittal is also asking the court to order the Housing Department to build a 2.4m-high wall to prevent people stealing steel clips from the railway.

"The risks associated with possible vandalism and theft of the steel clips holding the railway tracks in place has to be assessed. It stood to reason that a derailing of railway trucks would have catastrophic consequences," said Mlawuli Manjingolo - ArcelorMittal's company secretary - in his court application.

The company has also asked the court to instruct the Housing Department to reimburse it after it spent R474 253.84 to erect a razor-blade fence to prevent theft and to stop people walking across the railway line as a short cut.

ArcelorMittal has filed for the demolishing of 28 houses, but The Star found 79 houses had been built near the railway. It has also established that the Emfuleni Municipality was due to allocate the houses to the new owners this week.

The Housing Department granted permission to the Emfuleni



LIVING DANGEROUSLY: ArcelorMittal in Vanderbijlpark has taken the Gauteng government to court to demolish RDP houses built near their railway line in Tshepiso Township Extension 4, near Boipatong, in the Vaal.

PICTURE:ITUMELENG ENGLISH

The dangers

- The coal transported in the railway carriages adjacent to the development is used by ArcelorMittal in the production of steel and is not fit for domestic use.
- The gas released from burning the coal is poisonous and will lead to fatalities if used in enclosed areas, as is likely to happen if the occupiers take some of the coal

Municipality's town planners to lay out a plan of the proposed township known as Tshepiso Extension 4 Township near Vanderbijlpark and Boipatong in the Vaal. A construction company, Urban Dynamics, was given the tender to build the houses. Some people had taken occupation of the houses.

In its court papers, ArcelorMittal gives a detailed account of how since 2011, it had made several out-

for their own use.

- If the houses that encroach on to land alleged to be ArcelorMittal property are occupied, it will mean that families will stay less than 20m from the railway tracks.
- People, especially children playing in the area, will be at risk when railway carriages enter and exit ArcelorMittal's plant.

of-court attempts to stop the municipality from erecting these disputed houses.

The company argues that the last meeting to resolve the safety issues and the danger to the lives of people occupying the houses, had been held at the Housing Department's offices in Sauer Street, but no solution was found.

ArcelorMittal argues that if these houses are to be occupied, its

tenants would be exposed to poisonous gases and possible death.

The company also argues that their railway line is on a high-speed line and, depending on the wind direction and the nature of the raw materials being transported, excessive dust may be generated and may "have a negative effect on the living conditions of the inhabitants".

"The high-water table and clayey condition of the soil in the area may result in water being contaminated by the coal residue on the railway tracks, which will flow into the development when raining.

"The flow of water when raining will have an influence on the specifications of the fence to be erected on the southern boundary of the ArcelorMittal property. ArcelorMittal's input and recommendations were necessary before such specifications were finalised," Manjingolo said.

Emfuleni Municipality has already filed its intention to oppose the application and the matter is set down for trial on February 26.