



ArcelorMittal SA says dust emissions are at their lowest at its Vereeniging works, following the installation of a dust extraction system in 2010.

# Bench Marks accuses ArcelorMittal SA of pervasive harm

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**THE HEALTH** and safety of employees at ArcelorMittal South Africa's Vanderbijlpark plant have deteriorated and the environmental and housing conditions for the surrounding communities are deplorable.

These are some of the damning findings of interviews conducted by Bench Marks Foundation, a non-profit organisation that focuses on keeping local corporations on their toes.

The study, which is titled *Steel at Any Cost: A community voice perspective on the impacts of ArcelorMittal's operations in Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, Policy Gap 8*, was launched publicly during a press conference yesterday.

Bench Marks noted unfair labour and environmental practices by the steel giant at its Vanderbijlpark plant, claims which South Africa's biggest

steel maker has denied.

In its response, ArcelorMittal SA said pollution at its operations was under control, safety of employees was a priority and it had a comprehensive social responsibility programme focusing on health, development and education.

The company said that it had spent about R30 million replacing the roofs of some 3 000 households in Bophelong and Boipatong in the past four years.

It had spent R1 billion on environmental upgrades at its plants in the past five years, of which the lion's portion was spent at Vanderbijlpark.

In addition, ArcelorMittal SA said dust emissions were at their lowest at the Vereeniging works, following the installation of a dust extraction system in 2010.

The report comes after the courts ordered ArcelorMittal SA to hand over to the Vaal

## Arcelor Mittal SA

Share price, rand Aug 30-Nov 28



Environmental Justice Alliance its environmental plan on the rehabilitation of its Vaal disposal site, where it is allegedly dumping hazardous waste illegally.

John Capel, Bench Marks's executive director, yesterday went as far as calling for the government to review the steel maker's mining licence for ignoring the environmental impact of the plants, and as a

result it would push for a boycott of its products.

"We are hoping that government can say to ArcelorMittal SA it is either you respect our code of conduct or your mining licence will be reviewed. We are hoping that the level of pollution, injuries and illness will be reduced," Capel said.

According to the study, ArcelorMittal SA scores very low on creating a safe environment for its employees, and it cites how two employees died in 2011 after allegedly inhaling gas. In the report, an employee claims that a worker dies in the company every week, but the steel maker does not want such information to be leaked to outsiders. ArcelorMittal SA denied the allegation.

"The company has not recorded a fatal accident in more than two years and incidences of injuries have dropped significantly. As a company, we take special care

to ensure that our employees work in an environment that is safe and injury free," the company said in its response.

The report accuses ArcelorMittal SA of refusing to admit liability towards sick employees thereby evading compensation for treating employees who have contracted illnesses including TB and hearing loss.

Bench Marks said ArcelorMittal SA had destroyed the Vereeniging area and paid lip service to its corporate social responsibility.

The report was derived from interviews with 140 respondents and focus groups from affected communities conducted in 2010. It included no scientific data.

Asked for scientific evidence and figures, Capel said: "We are not here for statistics, but human life."

ArcelorMittal SA owns the steel operations of the former state-owned Iscor. page 18