

Environmental NGO hails Amsa victory

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FORMER Iscor employees who were allegedly laid off after they contracted occupational diseases would also benefit from a court decision that has forced the mining company to hand over its environmental records.

“For years, we’ve been fighting and marching against ArcelorMittal (previously Iscor), looking for these documents,” Phineas Malapela, of the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (Veja), said.

“It is a very valuable document so we can defend the rights of people, not only the ex-employees retrenched because they were sick, but the community at large... We think that it was the (environmental) master plan that was the source of their retrenchment,” he claimed.

This week the Gauteng High Court ordered ArcelorMittal (Amsa) to hand over records relating to its environmental master plan, which documented pollution levels at its plants between 2000 and 2002 as well as its plans to rehabilitate affected sites.

Veja wanted access to records relating to the closure and rehabilitation of its Vaal disposal site in Vereeniging where the company had illegally dumped waste in 2007.

In the court battle, ArcelorMittal said the plan was outdated and scientifically flawed. But Veja, and the Centre for Environmental Rights, which supported it, believed it would reveal the extent of the company’s pollution.

Robyn Hugo, an attorney at the Centre for Environmental Rights, which supported Veja in its quest for the records, said the judgment reinforced that civil society organisations were entitled to a watchdog role.

“Veja is now in a better position to hold Amsa accountable, to monitor and assess the rehabilitation measures taken, if any... and to do its own independent tests. It’s a great victory.”

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