

## **PENWELL DLAMINI**

ALMOST half of the people living around ArcelorMittal's operations in Vanderbijlpark, in the Vaal Triangle, have respiratory problems, according to a report released by the Bench Marks Foundation yesterday.

The survey on which the report is based was in 2011 and 2012. It was intended to determine the effect of ArcelorMittal's operations on workers, former workers and communities in the vicinity.

ArcelorMittal Vanderbijlpark is one of the world's biggest inland

# Giant steel mill 'a health hazard'

steel mills and the biggest supplier of flat-steel in sub-Saharan Africa.

The survey respondents were 180 people from neighbouring communities, and current and former employees of ArcelorMittal.

The major findings were:

- About 35% of the respondents complained of air pollution and said they had respiratory ailments such as bronchitis, tuberculosis, asthma, congested sinuses and coughing;

- Almost half (49%) of the residents said they had a respiratory problem, 17% TB and 12% bronchitis;

- Former and current workers described the working conditions at ArcelorMittal as hazardous, and said the noise and heat at the steel plant affected their health, causing sensory problems such as deterioration of vision and hearing;

- About 64% of the workers reported eyesight problems, and 36% suffered from loss of hearing; and

- About 25% of current and former workers said they had been injured at work, 25% had aching feet, 13% had leg injuries and 6% had been burned.

ArcelorMittal said it was studying the report.

Company spokesman Themba Hlengani said the steel maker had spent more than R1-billion on improving the working environment and had not had a fatality in more than two years.

He said that the company had built four schools, three science centres and a clinic for the people of neighbouring communities.

Bishop Jo Seoka, chairman of the Bench Marks Foundation, said the study was not just a scientific exercise but spoke for voices that had been silenced.

"We challenge our government to engage the company and review its licence.

"People are tired.

"They want this thing to stop so that they can enjoy the benefits of life as full citizens of this country," Seoka said.