

State's indifference to pollution 'killing people'

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THE government's failure to act against polluters is killing communities.

The report "Slow poison: air pollution, public health and failing government" accuses the state of ignoring dangerously high air pollution.

The report, released yesterday by environmental organisation Ground Work, the Centre for Environmental Rights and their partners, claimed that communities living near polluting companies were inhaling greater concentrations of airborne particles than recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Department of Environmental Affairs.

Communities in the Vaal Triangle were exposed to more fine particle pollution from Eskom's Lethabo power station, ArcelorMittal's steelworks and Sasol than allowed by the current national ambient air quality standard of $25\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and the WHO recommended standard of $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

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In 2011, the concentration in the air of fine particles in Diepkloof, Klipriver and Sebokeng was more than $60\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Residents of Secunda, Mpumalanga, near Sasol plants, were the most affected, with a coarse-particle concentration of at least $100\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

"The fact that the government has allowed the air quality management system to deteriorate to the point of collapse indicates . . . indifference to people's health and well-being," the report said.

Rico Euripidou, Ground Work's environmental health campaigner, said researchers had found a significant correlation between increases in illness and death and each $10\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in the concentration of fine particles in the air.

"It can cause illness and death through its impact on the [circulatory] system and on the blood itself, on the heart and lungs and on the respiratory, immune, nervous and reproductive systems. It also causes developmental problems in babies and children," he said.

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