



A partially cleaned portion of a tiled floor shows the contrast

Red dust covering the bottom of a Mtunzini resident's swimming pool

Residents see red

Mtunzini residents lament persistent red dust emissions from Fairbreeze mine

Tracey Turner

GARDENS, homes and pools in Mtunzini are blanketed in red dust, while residents are left fed-up at the ongoing onslaught.

Neighbours for nine years, the residents and Tronox's Fairbreeze mine co-existed without problem until mining ceased and rehabilitation began last year.

Residents say the red dust has worsened in recent strong winds and is affecting their health, with chronic coughing, aggravated asthma and sinus problems.

"For months, families - especially young children and the elderly - have been falling ill with constant respiratory problems," said one affected resident.

"Many of us have been medically diagnosed with upper respiratory tract infections (URTI). We believe this is a public health emergency, and that transparent environmental testing and health studies must be conducted by independent experts," she said.

"The exposure to dust causes immune response chronic sinusitis, eye and skin irritation from which our entire household suffers. Constant exposure has led to bronchospastic reactions, asthmatic attacks and autoimmune response in two of three members in the household," said another resident, while yet another said they live on antihistamines, antibiotics and sinus medication.

"We took our daughter to a specialist last week; she's been coughing non-stop. The doctor said, while the red dust could be an accelerant, you can't 100% say it is the cause. But it can make things worse and slow the healing process."

Despite countless complaints logged through the official Fairbreeze Project Complaints Portal since early 2024, and more recent complaints to and visits by

the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources (DMPR), residents feel unheard.

Communication breakdown

Mtunzini Residents Association (MRA) chairperson Jeremy Nottingham said, since the inception of the mine, Tronox and the MRA had an environmental oversight committee that meets regularly, usually quarterly.

The last meeting was in June, with the next set for early December, along with recent small-group site visits.

"The MRA has repeatedly urged Tronox to communicate more effectively and openly with the community affected by the dust, and latterly by noise from the mine," he said.

"During the nine years of active mining, there were very few problems. Only when active mining was completed and rehabilitation started did the current problems start in earnest.

"While Tronox has taken measures to try to reverse the dust problems, their communication leaves much to be desired and their efforts are seen by many as 'too little too late'," said Nottingham.

Tronox responds

Tronox said its efforts to minimise impact from nuisance dust has included installing netting, preparing land for rehabilitation, and restoring areas that have already been mined.

"We acknowledge the concerns raised by Mtunzini residents and take them seriously," said a company spokesperson.

"The safety and well-being of our employees and surrounding communities is always our first priority. We also conduct regular air quality monitoring and maintain robust dust suppression systems to minimise impact beyond the mine boundary.

"Independent audits by the local air quality inspectorate and the DMPR confirm that our operations comply with environmental and safety standards.

"No respiratory illness cases have been reported among 2 600 employees and contractors during the most recent DMPR reporting period. Over the life of Fairbreeze Mine - since 2015 - there have been zero reported respiratory illnesses among mine employees.

"A review by our appointed occupational hygienist and medical practitioner supports these findings. Current evidence does not indicate a link between Tronox KZN Sands' operations and the reported respiratory symptoms."

Tronox went on to say that it understands the importance of independent verification and remains open to collaborating with authorities on further assessments.

The company said it would continue to monitor air quality daily and share results transparently; engage openly with the Mtunzini community through forums and site visits, and uphold the highest standards of environmental responsibility and community care.



Red dust wiped off a household surface

Jail time for bar brawl convict

Conelia Harry

A RICHARDS Bay man will spend 15 years behind bars for the murder of father and husband Cornelius 'Neels' Johannes du Plessis.

The incident occurred in November 2022 at The Ranch in Arboretum.

Benjamin 'Bennie' du Preez was sentenced in the Richards Bay Magistrate's Court on Friday for the death of Du Plessis following a brawl at the popular premises.

Du Preez was further declared unfit to possess a firearm. A search-and-seize order for weapons was also handed down.

The court heard sentiments expressed from the victim impact statement of the deceased's family, in which Du Plessis' wife cited their daughter's emotional trauma, as well as difficulties and financial loss emanating from her husband's passing.

The family suffered a 66% drop in income,

and could never have prepared for such a loss.

The deceased's wife shared that following her husband's death, she suffered with depression and second-hand trauma from the incident.

Regional Court Magistrate WJJ Schutte shared that the province had an alarmingly high murder rate, and that Du Preez had contributed to those figures.

The court heard how the incident, caused by blunt force trauma, had occurred in the presence of Du Plessis' wife.

After vomiting and collapsing from his severe injuries, Du Plessis died in his wife's arms once they had returned to their rented Arboretum home after the ordeal.

Du Preez and co-accused Petrus Ernestus 'Boela' Olivier had been charged as having acted in common purpose in 'unlawfully and intentionally' causing the death of Du Plessis, but following testimony heard in court, Olivier was acquitted of the charge.

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