

Finger points at Foskor

Considering the magnitude of the incident, the findings, and the conclusions, we recommend continuous stack monitoring of sulphur trioxide

Dave Savides

BLAME for the 7 February gas incident that resulted in 370 community health harm complaints being logged has been laid at the door of Foskor.

Results of an independent investigation instigated by the Richards Bay Clean Air Association (RBCAA), which received the outraged complaints, were released this week.

The incident left residents – including a large number of Richards Bay High School learners, choking, retching, dizzy, nauseous, vomiting, with burning eyes and throats, and many requiring medical attention.

Symptoms matched those reported during the major gassing incident of 2002 when sulphur trioxide was found to be the cause.

The findings of the Air Impact Measurement Specialists (AIMS) study, concluded that sulphur trioxide, with some sulphur dioxide, led to the intense symptoms suffered by victims of the acidic gases.

'Unstable plant operating conditions' during the incident were reported.

Testimony, especially from those in industries close to Foskor and

eyewitnesses who reported seeing a dark cloud of gas emanate from the Foskor plant and onto the John Ross highway, played a major role in the AIMS conclusions, as did professional medical input.

Contrary to perceptions, the effects were not restricted to the disaster scene at Richards Bay High School but were felt as far away as Meeensee, Birdswood, Brackenham and Alton.

Background

The RBCAA had been told at a meeting held with Foskor that a fire at the Scorpio substation in September 2021 had necessitated an emergency shutdown at Foskor.

Sulphur dioxide and sulphur trioxide gasses were trapped in the sulphuric acid plants for several days, according to Foskor.

'These reacted with the moisture present and converted to sulphurous and sulphuric acid, which exacerbated the magnitude of the corrosion,' the report states.

'The integrity of the plants deteriorated from October 2021 and failed on 7 February. This explains the increase in frequency and intensity of sulphur dioxide exceedances and complaints.'

During the lead-up to the 7 February gas incident, numerous

complaints were registered with the RBCAA from the public and industry linked to Foskor's sulphuric acid plants.

'At times, industries such as Grindrod - Navitrade/Kusasa and South32 needed to evacuate their employees. Most complaints were of acidic gasses.

'In January, Foskor accepted responsibility for these complaints, including those that affected Grindrod and Navitrade, citing leaks on their acid plant as the cause,' the AIMS report stated.

It also noted a dramatic reduction in sulphur dioxide exceedances, correlating with the shutdown and repairs to the acid plants after the incident.

Going forward, AIMS noted the absence of the requirement for continuous monitoring of sulphur trioxide in Foskor's Atmospheric Emission Licence.

'Considering the magnitude of the incident, the findings, and the conclusions, we recommend continuous stack monitoring of sulphur trioxide,' stated the report.

Foskor, which previously denied responsibility for the gas leak based on its own investigations, had not responded with comment on the AIMS findings by the time of going to print.

Horses set to race in Empangeni

Muzi Zincume

THOUSANDS of visitors are expected to descend upon the City of uMhlatuze this weekend to experience the region's first horse racing event on Saturday.

Organised by the King Cetshwayo District Municipality, the racing which will see a full nine-race programme start at 10am at the Empangeni Airfield, is anticipated to provide a substantial boost to the local tourism industry.

'This event is expected to contribute more than R30-million towards our local economy. Currently, local hotels are almost full. Petrol stations and businesses around Richards Bay and Empangeni will benefit immensely, as will hawkers,' said District Mayor, Cllr Thami Ntuli.

He said the event sought to provide job opportunities for the youth, with

the 50 participating jockeys and 90 per cent of the entertainment, including fashion design participants, all young people.

Linking with the horse racing, a music festival will take place at uMhlatuze Sports Complex from 4pm.

'In total, about 70 per cent of this event's participants are from our district,' Ntuli said. The event will begin with a beauty pageant on Friday night at Umfolozi Casino.

All five local municipalities in the district will field their newly crowned title holders for a shot at the Miss and Mr King Cetshwayo title. The overall winners will walk away with R20 000.

This will be followed by horse racing with a music festival in Richards Bay.

Entrance is free but attendees need to get tickets from Boxer and Pick n Pay, as numbers are limited.

Ntuli has urged visitors to drink and act responsibly.



King Cetshwayo District Mayor, Cllr Thami Ntuli is passionate about youth development

Empangeni CPF on recruitment drive

Dave Savides

ENLIST to help fight crime in Empangeni.

That's the invitation from the Empangeni Community Police Forum (CPF), which has experienced many challenges over the past year.

The dedicated group of volunteers, led by chairperson Zonita Grobbelaar and deputy chairperson Rajen Pillay, regularly patrols the streets of the town together with SAPS and security companies.

'The unrest in July 2021 took us all by surprise, but the committed volunteers left their homes and families to help protect the streets and shops from looting, until the SANDF arrived to assist,' said Grobbelaar.

'Almost a year later, there were again threats of possible unrest and looting, and again these volunteers patrolled in the cold and rainy weather with Saps.

'Apart from that, each day the CPF members patrol, report and assist the police against criminality.

'The more people we have on board, the more effective we will be.'

To be added to a CPF suburb report group, contact Grobbelaar on 078 102 9615.

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