



The excavation site had been left unfilled after work was carried out

Repair job escalates sewage nightmare

Conelia Harry

AFTER enduring more than a year of sewage-related challenges near her property, a Meerensee resident's nightmare escalated last week when repair work caused further damage.

Residents say the excavator accidentally ruptured the municipal water pipe, severed fibre-optic cables on two occasions and cracked a stormwater drain.

"While the water leak that developed during the excavation appears to have been repaired, the original sewage problem remains unresolved," said Nicoll Joubert, whose property is opposite the excavation site at the corner of Kolsterkring and Loodvislyn.

"The large excavation has been left open at this busy intersection, creating significant traffic congestion, particularly with schools having reopened.

"The unfinished work is causing frustration for motorists, and raises serious safety concerns for residents and road users as commuters are left frustrated by the inconvenience.

"As a resident living directly opposite the excavation, I witness the daily disruption and the risks posed to motorists attempting to navigate the area.

"We believed the planned road closure for last Wednesday was to address a long-standing sewerage pipe failure that has left raw sewage flowing into a nearby greenbelt for years, but we ended up with more problems.

"The sewerage lines have been a

problem for a few years. About 30 metres down the road, there is untreated sewage, including visible toilet paper, sanitary products and other waste, flowing through the greenbelt, creating an unbearable stench and posing potential health risks.

"The smell was so severe last year that my husband, Brenton, called out a plumber

to investigate, believing the odour was coming from the property's plumbing, only to discover the smell was originating from the municipal sewage spill," she said.

The water pipe damaged during last week's excavation was reportedly repaired on Friday and Saturday, but residents say no work has yet been carried out on the original sewer pipe.

Community members have expressed disappointment that, despite the municipality's recent intervention, the original sewage problem remains unresolved while additional infrastructure has now been damaged.

Residents are calling on the City of uMhlathuze to provide an explanation for the delays, urgently repair the damaged sewer line, secure the excavation site, restore the affected infrastructure and prevent further environmental contamination.

According to a video posted online by Councillor Amica Struwig on Wednesday afternoon, the stormwater pipe had been replaced and backfilling was in progress.

The municipality was contacted for comment but none was forthcoming at the time of going to print.

Scan the QR code to see footage showing the extent of the damage.

"About 30m down the road, there is untreated sewage, including visible toilet paper, sanitary products and other waste flowing through the greenbelt, creating an unbearable stench and posing potential health risks"



MM makes court appearance

Conelia Harry

PHAKAMA Mhlango, City of uMhlathuze municipal manager (MM), appeared in the Richards Bay Magistrate's Court on Monday in connection with alleged contraventions of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA).

The charges stem from three fraud-related cases opened in November 2025, where the outstanding invoices total more than R44.3m.

It is believed the complainants - who rendered services to the City of uMhlathuze and submitted their invoices

within the required time frames - were not paid.

Mhlango faces 19 counts of contravening provisions of the MFMA, which requires an accounting officer to take all reasonable steps to ensure amounts owed by a municipality are paid within 30 days of receiving relevant invoices.

The State alleges that between 23 April 2025 and 11 September 2025, Mhlango unlawfully, intentionally, or through gross negligence failed to comply with the provisions of the MFMA.

The matter was postponed to 23 September.

Community marches to site

Mbuso Kunene

SCORES of community members from 11 villages, including KwaDube and Mkhwanazi, staged a peaceful march to the Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) Zulti South project site in eMpembeni on Wednesday morning.

Marchers handed over a memorandum demanding an urgent mandate for RBM and China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) to present percentage-based project allocations, rectify broken SLP commitments, and remediate substandard relocation housing for the Zulti South project.

Reading out the memorandum, community leader Cebelihle Zulu, part of the KwaDube Local Suppliers' Forum, said one of the key concerns is the alleged lack of communication regarding employment and local supplier opportunities linked to the multinational mining company's operations.

"We - the collective community, residents, youth, women, local business owners, and all stakeholders who depend on the land of the Dube Traditional Kingdom - have convened this peaceful march to express our deepest fury and frustration at the exclusionary methods deployed by RBM and CHEC regarding the Zulti South project," said Zulu.

"Let us be unequivocally clear, this land belongs to us. We will no longer tolerate being marginalised, reading about developments in the media, or being treated as spectators on our own ancestral land."

Displeasure with developments

Zulu said the community contends the 'highly deceptive public narrative in the media' that it is 'happy' about the ongoing development.

"We are not happy at all. This mass march is a true and living testament to our unresolved

grievances. The current online procurement portal utilised by RBM and CHEC places an unfair tech-barrier on our local enterprises. It systematically disadvantages us by forcing our micro-businesses to compete against the entire nation of South Africa for opportunities on our own doorstep," said Zulu.

Memorandum demands include

- A mandate for CHEC to present local allocation proposals in percentages
- The rejection of the online business portal and a call for accessible communication
- The enforcement of the 'onion ring approach' for skills and procurement
- Remediation of the defunct SLP Multi-Purpose Centre Project
- Redress for forestry dispossession and broken employment promises (two per household)
- Substandard relocation housing, leaking roofs, and failed sanitation

Institutionalisation of the Joint Steering Committee

Demands also included a specialised oversight committee, constituted by elected

representatives from the Dube Traditional Royal Council, the Dube community structures, Dube Business Council, and executive leadership from RBM and project directors from CHEC.

Bradly Kihn (RBM representative) signs the memorandum of demands



About-turn!

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After a full review of the current access arrangement for trucks was undertaken, a statement, issued by acting port manager Winnie Mpanza, reads:

"The port has received numerous complaints regarding infrastructure damage and environmental pollution on the road leading to the east gate entrance. The challenges are emanating from road motor transport (RMT) conveying cargo to the terminals.

"In the interest of the surrounding community, neighbouring businesses and port users at large, immediate intervention had to be adopted to mitigate and alleviate the issues at hand."

New rules

As of Wednesday, the following applies:

RMTs transporting dirty cargo are prohibited from using the east gate entrance, and must travel through the west gate and the truck staging gate. From there, these RMTs will access the gravel road located opposite the 6 Series area.

Only RMTs transporting clean cargo will be permitted to enter the port through the east gate.

"This decision prioritises the interest of the surrounding community and neighbouring businesses for a clean environment," said Mpanza.

"It further ensures port operations proceed without interruption, that traffic flow remains smooth, and that ongoing maintenance of the port road network continues with

minimal disruption."

While this is a battle won by the community, it leaves many unanswered question, with no reference made as to who will pay for the clean-up and repair work needed to restore a semblance of normality to the coal-devastated roads and environment.



The trucks have been stopped, but who will repair, clean up and remove the dust along the roads and pavements, and rehabilitate the green environment?