

Shortage of Landfill Sites, the Next Crisis to Affect Gauteng, warns the DA

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Gauteng is facing a waste crisis of enormous consequences, says the Democratic Alliance.

The party has warned that the clock is ticking on the lifespan of landfill sites in the province, while the government seems blithely unconcerned.

The DA in Ekurhuleni is particularly worried about the state of waste in its own metro, and how the waste disposal scenarios in the City of Johannesburg and Tshwane will impact on its landfill airspace in the immediate and long-term future.

The DA believes that the next ANC-generated crisis to affect Gauteng – after the Eskom debacle with the electricity supply, the Randwater and municipal water infrastructure failures, the sewerage treatment facilities inability to cope with current inflows – is the impact of waste generation and landfill capacity, caused by the general lack of political will to tackle the mountains of rubbish that are being created by the growing population of the economic powerhouse of Africa.

Three weeks ago the private FG landfill site in Olifantsfontein was threatened with closure by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA).

Without going into the details of the court orders and legalities of this specific case, which are in the public domain, the event triggered panic amongst waste officials from Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg about what to do with the approximate 55 000 tonnes of waste presently being directed to the FG landfill site per month.

The Northern Regions of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni do not have any remaining historically developed municipal landfill sites and are dependent on private operators.

At present, the Southern Regions of Tshwane, which include Centurion, direct their waste to the Onderstepoort landfill, which is about 35 km to the north. And this site is due to close at the end of 2017 as it will reach full capacity. The challenges facing Tshwane is where to redirect these 60 000 tonnes of waste per month. At present, Tshwane's combined landfills have a remaining life of seven years. Johannesburg's combined remaining landfill life is sitting at six years, which includes the current use of the FG landfill.* Due to erratic and poor planning, the unequal geographic spread of landfills in Gauteng will see a dramatic increase in transports costs, which will ultimately result in a substantial increase in waste collection tariffs per household.

In the case of the FG landfill site closing temporarily or permanently, Ekurhuleni would need to redirect the Tembisa and Olifantsfontein waste to the Weltevreden landfill in Brakpan, some 45kms to the south-east. This would create an immediate bottleneck of collection vehicles entering the landfill, reducing turnaround time at the landfill, and delaying collection rounds in

the towns of Brakpan, Benoni, Kempton Park and parts of Boksburg, thus creating uncollected waste to start mounting on the pavements within a week.

Refuse collection is already a problem in Ekurhuleni for an entirely different reason: refuse trucks are regularly in short supply due to broken-down trucks and extended repair times.

Ekurhuleni has the most remaining landfill airspace out of the three large metropolitan municipalities and should not bear the brunt due to bad planning elsewhere in the province. The domino effect of redirecting the waste stream from just one landfill will immediately impact the communities these cities serve.

The Polokwane Declaration adopted by all spheres of government in 2001 at the National Waste Management Summit, stated optimistically that the goal was to reduce waste generation and disposal by 50% and 25% respectively by 2012. This has not been reduced by the desired levels, instead, waste disposal has shown an increase in some areas. Developing a zero-waste strategy by the year 2022 is another goal.

The DA has requested answers from the Gauteng Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (GDARD) around the exact remaining airspace per landfill in Gauteng, and current waste tonnages being directed to landfills and the recycling industries. No answers have been forthcoming.

Data on waste found on the websites of Gauteng municipalities, GDARD and the national Department of Environmental Affairs clearly demonstrates that government has very little idea of what is transpiring in the world of waste.

All three spheres of government have conflicting figures which are usually outdated. How can Tshwane produce accurate tonnage figures when there are no operating weighbridges at all of their landfills?

Despite the ANC government's various declarations, policies, strategies and action plans developed and approved in South Africa over the last two decades, the reality is that based on studies undertaken by the CSIR only about 10% of waste generated in this country is recycled.

The last new municipal landfills licensed and developed in Johannesburg was in 1992, Ekurhuleni in 1997 and Tshwane in 1998, with a vast number of landfills closed after they reached full capacity since that time. What have the three tiers of government done over the past 19 years?

The DA requests the provincial government, backed by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), and with the buy-in of all Gauteng local governments, to convene at the soonest a gathering of all players in the waste industry to discuss an immediate solution for the looming crisis. These discussions should include short, medium and long-term solutions.

The only new landfills recently licensed and constructed in the province have been by the private sector and the DA sees the private sector's role as pivotal in averting any short-term crisis. While all spheres of government have lagged behind, the private sector is the main generator of all recycling initiatives and is less likely to be swayed by political motives and cadre incompetence.

The DA calls upon every resident in Gauteng to also assist in averting a waste crisis by separating household waste at source, recycling and composting, amongst many other entrepreneurial activities, and by calling their politicians to be held accountable.

*This is based on information presented in the *City of Tshwane's Integrated Waste Management Plan (2014)* and *City of Johannesburg's Waste Minimisation Strategy (2014)* reports released by the respective municipalities.

Photo Caption: "Ekurhuleni's blasé attitude towards waste and recycling has resulted in the creation of the 'Plastic City', an informal recycling settlement opposite the Weltevreden landfill site in Brakpan, thereby breaking every municipal by-law."

Photo Credit: Gary Scallan

Reference:

Findings presented in this press release forms part of a presentation due to be made by Kobus Otto (Kobus Otto & Associates) at the Institute of Waste Management of South Africa (IWMSA) workshop on Landfills in Gauteng, scheduled for 10:00 on 29 March 2017 at PlasticsSA, Midrand.

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