

groundWork opposing Minister's plan to weaken air pollution standards

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[Environmental justice](#) group [groundWork](#), represented by the Centre for [Environmental](#) Rights (CER), has launched High Court proceedings against [Environmental](#)Affairs Minister [Nomvula Mokonyane](#) and President [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) and is asking the court to set aside government's plan to double the amount of sulphur dioxide (SO²) polluters are allowed to emit.

The weakening of the standards will allow all [coal](#)-fired boilers to emit double their previously allowed SO₂ pollution from April 1, 2020, states [groundWork](#).

This includes the already heavily-polluted Vaal, Highveld and Waterberg priority areas.

The weakened standards for SO² are now about ten times weaker than the equivalent standards in [India](#) and about 28 times weaker than the standards in [China](#), the group states in a [media release](#).

Should the court agree with [groundWork](#), big SO² emitters like State-owned [Eskom](#) and [petroleum](#) company [Sasol](#) will have to immediately reduce their pollution and, in doing so, reduce their impact on people's [health](#) and wellbeing.

According to [groundWork](#), the doubling of the SO² standards – from 500 mg/Nm³ to 1 000 mg/Nm³ – was introduced by the Department of [Environmental](#) Affairs as an amendment to the minimum emission standards (MES) – but without first publishing the proposed doubling of the SO² standard for comment as the law requires.

The Air Quality Act indicates that any proposed change to the MES has to be published for public comment and must “contain sufficient information to enable members of the public to submit meaningful representations or objections”.

Although other proposed changes to the relevant law were made available for comment in May 2018, there was no indication whatsoever that any changes were being considered in relation to the MES for [coal](#)-fired boilers, [groundWork](#) avers.

“Air pollution from [coal mining](#) and [power](#) is already killing thousands of people every year in places like the Mpumalanga Highveld. Instead of enforcing compliance with our already weak standards, government now wants to weaken the standards even further.

“If government will not defend the right to a healthy [environment](#), we have no option but to ask the court to do so,” [groundWork](#) director [Bobby Peek](#) says.

The Minister has indicated her intention to oppose [groundWork](#)’s court application. The Minister’s answering affidavit is expected at the end of May. 🇷🇺

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