

Health risk concern over dumped fluorescent tubes

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Omega Moagi, The Witness



Fluorescent tubes found dumped in a bush in Pentrich. (Supplied)

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A pile of fluorescent tubes that could have a detrimental effect on the environment and residents, is being dumped in a bush in Pentrich.

The end of Slangspruit Road resembles an active landfill site with illegal dumping rife. Among the debris are scrap metals, plastic pipes, litter as well as the lethal mercury-containing fluorescent tubes.

A business owner in the area, who asked not to be named for fear of victimisation, alleged that tubes were being dumped by another business in the area.

“Companies pay this guy to come dispose of their fluorescent tubes for them and all he does is dump them in the bush here,” said the business owner.

He said he was concerned as this could have a harmful effect on him and other people near the site. “What’s worrisome is that there is a river down the road about 400 metres away from the site and children are going to start getting sick from this.”

Rico Euripidou from groundWork said the dispersal of mercury — the substance contained in fluorescent tubes — was a global concern because of its harmful effects on human health and the environment.

“Toxic effects, in humans, spread across a broad spectrum of diseases including autism, Alzheimer’s disease, ALS, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, neurodevelopmental diseases in children, nephrotoxicity, and cancer,” said Euripidou. “And once released into the environment as either solid or liquid waste or as emissions, it can contribute to polluting the local and global environments through the formation of toxic compounds such as methylmercury — the most toxic form of mercury and the most widespread form of mercury contaminant in fish and aquatic systems.”

He said the safest way to dispose fluorescent tubes was through recycling, and dumping them was an environmental crime that should be reported.

Patricia Schröder, managing director of Reclite, an organisation that focuses on the recycling of fluorescent tubes, said recycling has become the only legal way to dispose of fluorescent tubes.

“As of August 2016, all waste lighting was restricted to landfill, and has to be recycled, in a permitted licensed facility, as issued by the Department of Environmental Affairs,” said Schröder. “We recover and recycle 100% of waste lighting with no residue to landfill as all the recycled fractions are re-used in other applications, including the toxic portions.”

Msunduzi Mayor Themba Njilo said illegal dumping was an issue that the municipality was fighting hard to combat.

“We will strengthen our law enforcement policies surrounding illegal dumping because it is a serious problem which we encounter in the city. Currently the fine is R1 000 and I believe all those involved in it should get arrested,” said Njilo.

He said his team would investigate the incident in Pentrich and the company involved would be brought to justice.

Municipal spokesperson Thobeka Mafumbatha said fluorescent tubes were classified as hazardous in terms of the municipality’s waste management by-laws and any person who intentionally or negligently discarded waste was guilty of an offence.

“Bulbs that have reached the end of their life should be disposed of responsibly, as [incorrect handling] may release the mercury into the environment if the bulbs/lights are damaged,” she said.

To report any fluorescent dumping incidents contact National Green Scorpions hotline: 0800 205 005, Hazmat 24hr Response: drizit@iafrica.com, gerard@drizit.co.za, 086 100 0366 or 083 235 6618, Msunduzi LM Waste Management community.services@msunduzi.gov.za or call 033 392 5359 or 033 392 5351.

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/health-risk-concern-over-dumped-fluorescent-tubes-20170402>