

# Highveld Killing Fields

**Government's controversial non-enforcement of minimum emission standards for Eskom and Sasol are resulting in people of the Highveld dying prematurely.**

It also causes respiratory and cardiac illnesses. This all according to findings released on Monday in a damning report by the Centre for Environmental Rights, groundWork and the Highveld Environmental Justice Network.

The release of the report, entitled Broken Promises: the Failure of the Highveld Priority Area, coincided with a peaceful protest at the Department of Environmental Affairs annual Air Quality Lekgotla in Woodmead by people who live and work in areas most effected.

In 2007 the Minister of Environmental Affairs declared 31 000 square kilometres of the heavily-polluted Mpumalanga Highveld a priority area in terms of the Air Quality Act. The Highveld Priority Area (HPA) was created because, as the DEA said at the time, 'people living and working in these areas do not enjoy air quality that is not harmful to their health and well-being.'

In 2015 however, Eskom and Sasol were permitted postponements of compliance with minimum emission standards. According to the report, this makes it significantly less likely that air pollution in the area will be reduced. It estimates that Eskom's power stations alone cause 2 239 deaths a year, 94 680 days of asthma symptoms, 9 533 cases of bronchitis in children, 996 628 lost working days, nearly four million days of restricted activity, all at a cost of US\$2,3 billion a year.

The report lists each death or type of disease or caused and at which power stations per year, showing Medupi to be the worst offender responsible for 364 deaths a year in its vicinity.

Mpumalanga Highveld towns of eMalahleni, Middelburg, Secunda, Standerton, Edenvale, Boksburg

and Benoni are home to 12 of Eskom's 15 coal-fired power stations, Sasol's giant refinery at Secunda, metal smelters, hundreds of coal mines and producers of fertilizer, chemicals, explosives and charcoal. As a result, the towns have ongoing problems with air pollution.

'A decade after the HPA's declaration,' says the report, 'air quality in the HPA remains poor and out of compliance with health-based national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS). This is confirmed by expert analysis and the DEA's own reports, including its draft review published in February 2017 which found that emissions have not decreased significantly over this period.'

'It is likely that the continued non-compliance with NAAQS is, in large part, due to the failure of key major industrial facilities to reduce their emissions either adequately, or at all.'

The report sets out a number of key recommendations that authorities should implement to demonstrate that improving air quality in the HPA is, in fact, a priority for government.

These include the insistence that all facilities in the HPA comply with at least the minimum emission standards, that no further postponements of compliance be allowed, and that licensing authorities suspend the issuing of all new emission licences until there is consistent compliance.

It calls for effective compliance monitoring, the strengthening of monitoring institutions and transparency in dealings with the DEA. **Credit-Conservation Action Trust & IOL.co.za**

**Sasol indicated that they will be responding to this article, but it was not received by The Bulletin's time of going to press. Please read next week's Bulletin for Sasol's response. The report Broken Promises will also be available on our website for general**