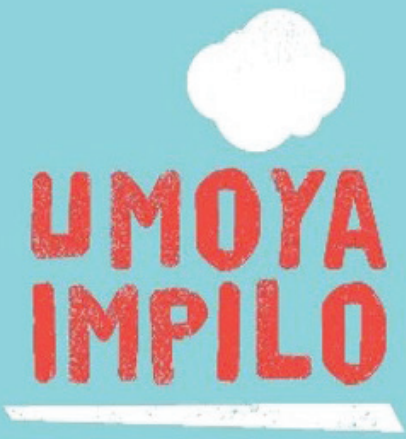




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MODULE TWO

Laws about air pollution

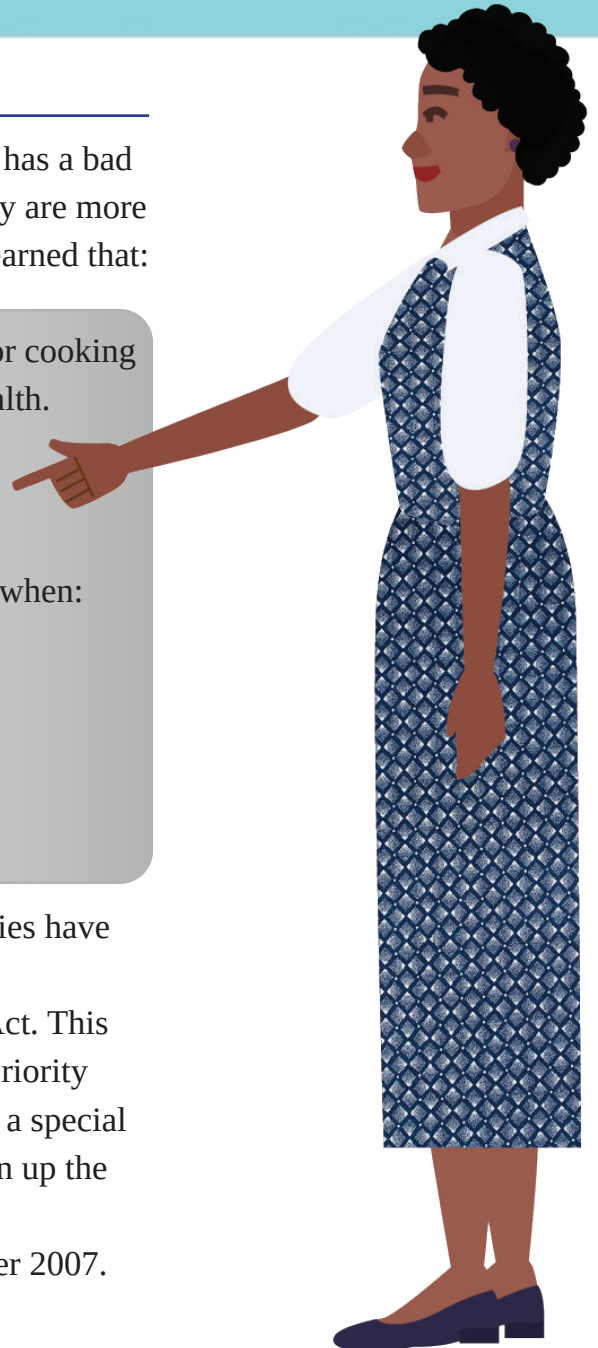
Hello. As we talked about in the last module, air pollution has a bad effect on everyone, and especially on children because they are more active, and because their bodies are still developing. We learned that:

1. Factories, power stations, cars, burning waste and indoor cooking fires can all make smoke and gas that is bad for our health.
2. There are also small bits in the air that we cannot see.
3. Bad smells often mean that bad chemicals are in the air.
4. Some of the signs that pollution is causing sickness are when:
 - a. someone finds it hard to breathe
 - b. the heart does not beat regularly
 - c. blood pressure problems
 - d. low birth weight
5. The air outside and the air inside can both be bad.

These things have been known for a long time. Many studies have been done and many laws have been made.

In South Africa, we have a law called the Air Quality Act. This law says that areas that have very bad air can be called a Priority Area. What this means is that the area should be treated in a special way and that extra effort must be made in that area to clean up the pollution in the air.

The Highveld was declared a Priority Area in November 2007.



AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN (AQMP) FOR THE HIGHVELD

An Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP for short) is a plan that says what is going to be done to fix the air pollution with the purpose of protecting people's health. It took more than four years for the AQMP for the Highveld Priority Area (HPA) to be made.

Some other letters - or **acronym** - that we have to learn is NAAQS. These letters stand for National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These **standards** have been set by the government for the whole country and they say how much of different bad things are allowed in the air. Factories and mines and power stations are all supposed to obey these standards.

The AQMP set different goals. Most of these were meant to be reached by 2020. These goals talked about making less pollution in the air in the Highveld. Different people were made responsible for working on the problem of air pollution.

After ten years, some NGOs did some research and found that the air had not got any better. The government also did some research and they also found that the air pollution was still very bad.



WORDS & CONCEPTS EXPLAINED

Acronym: when we take the first letters of words that often get used but which are long to say or write, we call that an acronym. One we all know is VAT. We say it like a word, but actually it stands for Value Added Tax.

Standards: levels that people agree are good.

SOME IMPORTANT ACRONYMS

AQMP: Air Quality Management Plan

DEA: Department of Environmental Affairs

HPA: Highveld Priority Area

NDM: Nkangala District Municipality

NAAQS: National Ambient Air Quality Standards

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

This is a picture of Kendal power station. Twelve of the power stations that make South Africa's electricity are in the Highveld. There are three others in other places. Power stations are a big source of pollution

WHAT THE RESEARCH FOUND



- 1 Since the Highveld was made a Priority Area, the quality of the air has not improved. This is mostly because the big factories and power stations have not done anything to make sure that they do not put so many dirty things into the air.
- 2 There are not enough monitoring stations that work properly in the area. This means that there is not enough information to be able to check which factories are letting dirty things into the air and when they do this.
- 3 Even if there is information about what has been let into the air, the factories and government don't let people see it. If people do manage to see the information, it is hard to understand and only experts can understand it. It is expensive to hire experts to help ordinary people to understand the information.
- 4 Almost nothing has been done to make the amount of dust in the air less. The mines on the Highveld cause a lot of dust to get into the air, but the Department of Mineral Resources, which is in charge of things to do with mines is not involved in the tasks to do with the Highveld Priority Area.
- 5 The plan that was made to make pollution in poor areas less is not very good. It also does not allow ordinary people to be involved in how the plan will work. The plan is not yet in action and nobody knows when it will be.
- 6 The district municipality that looks after the HPA is the Nkangala District Municipality (NDM). The NDM and the municipalities that it covers do not have the right people with the right skills to try to make the factories and power stations follow the laws.
- 7 The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) is not helping the municipalities like it should. The National Air Quality Officer who should make sure that at least the lowest standards are kept has also allowed some factories and power stations to take much longer to do what they are supposed to do.

SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE!



As we learned in the first module, people on the fenceline of the polluting factories and power stations are worst affected by the pollution that these places make. The people on the fencelines are also normally poor people. And the people who suffer the most are children.

We also learned that even poor people have rights, and the **constitution** in South Africa says that every person has a right to “an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being”. This means that every person in the country, no matter who they are, has a right not to be harmed by what is around them.

There are also other things in the constitution that are important to us.

One says that the environment should be protected for everyone. This also means for our children and for their children. We should not allow the air and the water and the earth to become so polluted that it threatens our health or the health of the environment.

Another thing in the constitution says that we have to always do what is best for every child. This means that the government and companies and people in South Africa have to always try to do what is best for children so that they can grow up strong, healthy and able.

This photograph was taken by Daylin Paul. No wonder we find it hard to breathe!



OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS ARE NOT BEING UPHELD

It is clear that our rights are not being taken care of. We can see and smell and feel that the air is bad. The government knows that the air is bad and they even made the Highveld a Priority Area because of how bad the air is.

So what is the problem?

- ✓ We have some good laws.
- ✓ We have some good plans.
- ✓ We have some good goals.

But our air is not getting better.

THE DEADLY AIR CASE

Two NGOs, groundWork and Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action, have decided to take the government to court about the problem. They have tried many other ways to talk to the government, but nothing has changed. This case is called the “Deadly Air” case. They are saying that the air the people are made to breathe is dangerous and can kill people. That is why it is deadly.

These NGOs and community groups say that the levels of outdoor air pollution in the Mpumalanga HPA are harmful to people’s health and well-being. It is so bad that in some cases the bad air can cause people to die sooner than they should.



CAN BREATHING BAD AIR REALLY KILL PEOPLE?

Because of the research that has been done, it can be proven that bad air does make people very sick and does kill them. Here are some things that they found when they studied air pollution that is caused by Eskom’s power stations:

- It is mainly your heart and your lungs that are affected by air pollution.
- Children in particular suffer badly from asthma and every day about 270 children on the Highveld have an asthma attack.
- Many children are badly affected by bronchitis, which is caused by air pollution.
- Each day, seven people go to hospital because of problems caused by air pollution.
- Almost three thousand people stay at home each day because of sickness that is caused by bad air.

These numbers make it clear that air pollution is a very serious problem. By not taking the proper steps to make sure that the laws that are meant to keep our air clean are being properly followed, the government is not following the constitution.



Dust from mining activities is a big source of pollution, particularly the particulate matter that we talked about in Module One.

