



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Building houses in exclusion zones courts disaster, Bench Marks warns

Johannesburg, Tuesday 29 August 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local government authorities that are allowing housing to be built within 500 metres of tailings dams and other mine waste sites are courting disaster, according to the Bench Marks Foundation.

This allegation is contained in a new study, “Waiting to inhale” released today by Bench Marks. It is an in-depth report into research conducted over three years into households in four suburbs of Soweto – Riverlea, Diepkloof, Meadowlands and Doornkop.

The study uncovers numerous instances, including the building of houses, where the required 500 metre exclusion zone from mine waste sites is not being adhered to. Bench Marks recommends that the 500 metre limit be extended to 2000 metres.

Some houses are built in flood plains, and during the rainy season are subject to rising underground water, some of which is highly toxic, having been contaminated by acid mine drainage and spills from mine waste sites.

Other issues that require the attention of metros and local government authorities are:

- Better protection of heritage sites. The study found, for example, that there was no safety exclusion zone between the Central Rand Gold (CRG) mining operation and the national heritage site of George Harrison Park;
- Better protection in terms of the constitutional right to a healthy and safe environment for education facilities such as TC Esterhuysen School, the Soweto campus of Johannesburg College and a number of schools in Meadowlands. Apart from being too close to the mining operation, the access road to T.C. Esterhuysen Primary School collapsed recently due to the opencast operations of CRG. The college is situated in buildings and housing that once belong to Crown Mines. Less than a decade after it moved in, the National Nuclear Regulation condemned its establishment in an area that is highly radioactive;
- Stricter enforcement of building laws and regulations that prohibit building in flood plains such as in Diepkloof and Doornkop; and
- Stricter enforcement of waste management laws and regulations and of the 500 metre exclusion zones.

The study says that the allocation of mining licences for areas in which a 500 metre exclusion zones applies is common in Gauteng, and are “disasters waiting to happen”.

“Mines within 500 metres from major roads, railway lines, housing, schools, electric power lines, and petroleum and water pipelines are short sighted and not in the interests of public health and safety.

“Meadowlands, Riverlea, Davidsonville, Reigerpark and Delmorpark are all townships in which housing is located without any attention to exclusion zones,” the study claims.

ENDS

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation mandated by churches to monitor the practices of multi-national corporations to

- ensure they respect human rights;
- protect the environment;

- ensure that profit-making is not done at the expense of other interest groups; and
- ensure that those most negatively impacted upon are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporations.

The Foundation was launched in 2001 by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC.

Bench Marks Foundation contact:	Bench Marks Foundation media contact
David van Wyk, Lead Researcher, +27 (0) 82 652 5061 Chris Molebatsi, Research Officer, +27 (0) 73 792 8272 Hassen Lorgat, Advocacy and Lobbying Officer, + (0) 82 362 6180 Bench Marks Foundation, +27 (0) 11 832 1743/2 Email: info@bench-marks.org.za	Ruth Coggin +27 (0) 82 903 5819 Email: ruth@quo-vadis.co.za