

Press Release

Date: Monday, October 27, 2008

PPC Cement Plant in New Brighton is the Focus of the First National Community Meeting against Cement Kiln Pollution

Community representatives from throughout South Africa [1] converge on the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro today to work in solidarity with the residents of New Brighton in their resistance to the pollution from PPC's oldest cement plant [2] in South Africa which is situated in the middle of a residential area. Hosted by groundWork [3], this is the first national community meeting of people affected by cement operations nationally. Local community people in New Brighton have long complained of respiratory problems and eczema which they attribute to the PPC operations. The plant permanently bathes the community in a fine cement dust.

The cement industry in South Africa is regulated using the outdated Air Pollution Prevention Act of 1965 (APPA), which ironically endorses pollution rather than calling on the cement industry to manage their pollution in an acceptable manner. Under the APPA, the cement industry is only regulated for dust or particulates. They are not regulated for sulphur, nitrogen or any cancer causing chemicals such as volatile organic compounds or persistent organic pollutants such as Dioxins and Furans [4] or heavy metals such as mercury [5]. With the burning of waste such pollution increases. Already the PPC New Brighton plant is incinerating hazardous waste from BHP Billiton's aluminum smelters in Richard Bay.

Community awareness of and resistance to the cement industry in South Africa has been building over the last year as community people become aware of the fact that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) is collaborating with the cement industry to allow the burning of waste, including hazardous waste. This despite community people living next to these plants asking the DEAT and the Portfolio Committee on Environment and Tourism in the National Assembly to veto these proposals. Members of the New Brighton community visited Parliament a year ago, in November 2007, and requested that this practice and proposals be stopped.

Waste incineration and, in particular, hazardous waste incineration has been actively resisted in South Africa since the 1980s when Thor Chemical imported hazardous waste into South Africa and incinerated it in Cato Ridge outside Durban. Here three workers died and more than forty were injured due to mercury contamination. Recently the municipality of Sasolburg has vetoed a hazardous waste incineration proposal by Peacock Bay Environmental Services in October 2002.

There has been no independent air pollution or other environmental testing done in the neighbourhood of New Brighton that has been informed by community concerns and input. Despite PPC being allowed to burn hazardous waste at the plant, there has been no analysis of the constituents of the cement dust currently emanating from the plant.

To coincide with the national exchange, there will be a public meeting at the New Brighton Community Hall tonight at 17:00 hrs where people will share testimony about conditions elsewhere in South Africa and to call for a veto on government's and PPC's push to incinerate waste in New Brighton.

End.

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Footnotes:

[1] Community people are from Port Shepstone, Mafikeng, Pretoria, Lichtenberg and the Western Cape where PPC and Natal Portland Cement have their plants.

[2] For extensive information on the cement kiln industry please visit <http://www.groundwork.org.za/Cement.html>

[3] groundWork (www.groundwork.org.za) is an environmental justice organization working with community people from around South Africa and increasingly in Southern Africa on environmental justice and human rights issues focusing on Air Pollution, Waste, Health Care Waste and Corporate Abuse. groundWork is a member of Health Care Without Harm (www.no-burn.org). GAIA is a worldwide alliance of more than 500 grassroots groups, non-governmental organizations, and individuals in over 80 countries whose ultimate vision is a just, toxic-free world without incineration.

[4] Dioxins and Furans are inadvertently created through combustion and industrial activities and are considered to be persistent, bio-accumulative toxic compounds. Some are carcinogenic and are suspected to be neurological, developmental and reproductive toxicants or endocrine disruptors.

[5] Mercury is classified as a persistent, bioaccumulative toxic (PBT) chemical. It can cause neurological and developmental problems, particularly in children.