

Sasol lists on the New York Stock Exchange

South African petrochemical giant Sasol will list on the New York stock exchange on 9 April 2003. Although originally established by the Apartheid government in 1950 to help South African through its years of international isolation, Sasol has grown to become a multinational corporation, with state support, operating in more than 15 countries. While heralded by the investment community as one of Africa's bright stars, many of Sasol's poorer neighbours paint a different picture of a company which puts profits before people.

The good, the bad and the ugly

The good

Sasol does have much to be proud about. Sasol invests more into Research and Development (at least US\$R60 million p.a) than any other South African company. They also sponsor wildlife and conservation programmes and publications, as well as donate several R million every year for community development and humanitarian causes. They also produce award-winning environmental reports of their SA operations. Sasol has also achieved ISO 14001 certification at some of its production plants. For all of this they are to be commended.

The bad

However, Sasol is one of South Africa's biggest polluting industries. In an obvious strategy of putting profits before people and the environment, Sasol has not taken all the necessary steps to reduce pollution emitted from its South African operations.

Air samples taken by residents in and around Sasolburg, the town named after the company, identified elevated levels of many toxic pollutants. Sasolburg residents complain of many health problems, which they believe are caused by pollution emanating from the many Sasol-owned industries in the area, including a crude oil refinery. It is jointly owned by Sasol and Total South Africa PTY LTD (FinalElf).

Sasol has itself acknowledged that ambient levels of benzene in Sasolburg have exceeded US guidelines on at least eight occasions during 2002. Benzene is known to cause leukaemia and cancer of blood-forming organs.

In Secunda, Sasol owns several coal mines, two refineries producing liquid fuels and chemical feedstocks from coal, and several downstream chemical industries. When Sasol first began developing in Secunda in the early 1980s, black people were relocated downwind to a township called eMbalenhle. The township is now surrounded by mines and mine dumps. A large percentage of the young people in eMbalenhle suffer from respiratory illnesses like sinus problems, asthma, burning sensations in the throat and chest, as well as from skin irritations and burning eyes.

The ugly

Sasol has refused to acknowledge the toxic effects of their emissions of hydrogen sulphide (H_2S). Sasol releases over 242 550 pounds of H_2S emissions in South Africa annually, but states that H_2S is nothing more than an "odour nuisance" with no "health risk". In fact, H_2S is a broad-spectrum poison affecting the eyes, respiratory system and central nervous system. Exposure to H_2S can result in, amongst other things: coma, convulsions; conjunctivitis, headaches and gastrointestinal disturbance. Inhaling high levels can be fatal.

Come on, Sasol, you can do much better than that!

If Sasol does spend so much on R&D aimed at product innovation and continuous improvement, if Sasol does make approximately US\$4 million every day (weekends and holidays included), why do Sasol's fenceline communities still have to put up with this kind of pollution?

SASOL

A global leader or major polluter?



Yes, Sasol does put much into the community, for example, sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, Volatile Organic Compounds, vinyl chloride and many other toxic chemicals.

The Future

Will Sasol follow in the steps of Shell, BP, Chevron and other oil companies that have been accused of gross human rights abuses in foreign countries? Sasol does not need to go this route. We call on Sasol to:

1. Reduce pollution at all of its plants worldwide as a part of environmental improvement plans which have set emission targets and timeframes.
2. Take steps to ensure that all Sasol plants reduce the number of industrial incidents and flaring, which both lead to emissions of Sasol products and chemicals into the environment.
3. Operate according to best available international environmental and health standards and guidelines.
4. Provide piped gas to neighbouring communities where Sasol exploits and refines gas.
5. Ensure that the first item on the agenda of its million-dollar research and development program is the reduction of pollution on the fence-line of Sasol industries and affected communities.
6. Publish what it is paying governments in all countries.
7. Publish what tax breaks and development incentives it receives from governments world wide.
8. Recognise the fact that many of its plants in South Africa and North America are located adjacent to and impact disproportionately on black communities.
9. Undertake full rehabilitation of all historical pollution and environmental damage resulting from all plants now owned by Sasol.
10. Reduce and finally eliminate the production of toxic chemicals that are persistent and bio-accumulate in the environment and humans.
10. Put people before profits!

What can YOU do?

As Sasol becomes increasingly globalised, we call on the international community, shareholders new and old, to direct and encourage Sasol to, ABOVE AND BEFORE ALL ELSE, respect and protect people, societies and the environment. We also ask that you call on the governments of all countries in which Sasol operates to hold Sasol fully accountable for all and any damage caused by Sasol operations to human health or the environment.

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Sasol's track record: Pollution, deaths and injuries

- At least 30 workers died in work-related accidents at Sasol plants in South Africa in the past 7 years.
- Between 1997 and 2000, approximately 4000 workers were injured while on duty at Sasol SA operations.
- SASOL's vinyl facility in Mossville USA is one of the dirtiest industries in the US, ranking in the top 10 percent of industrial companies that create the highest cancer risk from air and water pollution. This facility generates dioxin, a known cancer-causing agent. Mossville residents have 2-3 times more dioxin in their bodies than the general US public.
- A fire at the Natref oil refinery killed two workers in 2001.
- Sasol was fingered during a Commission of Enquiry into the fall of the Rand.
- Over 3 000 000 pounds of carbon dioxide were emitted by Sasol's SA operations during the 99/2000 year. Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas responsible for global warming.
- During the same year, Sasol's SA operations emitted 264600 pounds of H₂S and 646065 pounds of SO₂.
- Sasol's Secunda operations emit around 400 tons of volatile organic compounds every year.
- Three chlorine gas leaks from Sasol Polymers' south Durban plant during 2000 resulted in more than 300 people, mostly school children requiring medical attention. This plant was subsequently shut down. Sasol said the move was for economic reasons and not in response to the incidents.
- Sasol was awarded an "academy award" for at the Greenwash Academy Awards held in Sandton at the WSSD in 2002.