

AN UPDATE FROM THE SHONGWENI LANDFILL

Many residents living in the Shongweni, Hillcrest and surrounding communities will be aware of an odour problem in the area. As one of the largest businesses in Shongweni, we'd like to apologise to you for our contribution to this problem. We really care about being a responsible company and a good neighbour, so we'd also like to give you more information about what the smell is, where it is coming from, and what we're doing to correct it. Importantly, we want to give you an assurance of when you can expect it will be fixed.

Who is EnviroServ and what do we do?

For nearly 40 years EnviroServ has been a leader in the South African waste management industry. The company handles the transport and long-term disposal of waste safely and effectively throughout the country. We provide an essential service to the business community by disposing of hazardous materials without polluting the environment. Without the services we provide, many business would simply be unable to operate.

EnviroServ operates under licence from the DEA and has always complied with prevailing regulations.

When did the complaints start?

We first became aware of odour complaints from the community surrounding our Shongweni site in April 2016. This was the first time we had recorded a concentration of complaints since we first started operating there.

We started talking to the community immediately and a town hall meeting was held where a Working Group (including members of the community), was set up and tasked to conduct a joint fact finding mission. We also set up a dedicated complaints line where people could report odour events via a website or SMS. In August, the Working Group was dissolved and a further two Monitoring Committee meetings with community representatives were held before year end.

How have we intervened?

In late August, EnviroServ committed to a number of interventions as agreed with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). In consultation with them, we implemented a comprehensive programme at the site in an effort to reduce any contribution to the odour.

In October, the DEA issued a compliance notice. This is an administrative remedy which assists in enforcement of environmental laws, and it stemmed from community odour complaints from Shongweni.

So what's the problem, then?

Because we'd never experienced concentrated odour complaints until April last year, we have spent a great deal of time trying to get to the bottom of the problem. After months of investigations, we concluded that the odour was caused by the change in pH of the landfill.

In short, the odour coming from our site is hydrogen sulfide gas. The good news is that because of interventions we've now put in

place, the average emissions leaving the site are dropping. This has been confirmed by tests done by independent experts as well as our own real-time air monitoring.

What are we doing to rectify the situation?

Continued treatment of incoming waste to higher pH levels will help to further capture and contain a significant percentage of the gas. We have proposed progressive capping of the active cell, Valley 2, and the installation of an active gas extraction system, and are awaiting DEA approval.

Is the waste we are treating toxic, and do we import waste?

The waste is hazardous, not toxic. That's an important distinction. We do not import waste. Our trucks being seen coming from the harbour are in fact just collecting galley waste from the ships.

Has the odour ever been proved to be dangerous?

No. For over 15 years, we've had comprehensive occupational health surveillance programmes in place for all our employees at Shongweni. No employee has ever been found to suffer from any occupational disease as a result of working at the Shongweni Landfill site.

Since April last year, we've had teams of scientists employed to investigate the odour. They have concluded – to the best of their knowledge – that while unpleasant, the odour is not at a concentration which is in any way harmful to humans or animals. Previous independent air quality studies conducted in the area have also not indicated any health impacts.

How can we be sure?

We want to be really sure, and we want you to be really sure too. That's why an independent toxicologist is conducting an in-depth health risk assessment. Once this is complete in April, any identified gaseous pollutants from the Shongweni site will have been assessed as to the potential health risk they pose to the neighbouring communities as well as EnviroServ's employees on site. Additionally, an environmental management company is undertaking a technical assessment of the site management to ensure it is being operated optimally.

When will the situation be resolved?

We are confident that within six months, our numerous interventions will have brought the odour under control. This means there should be no odour prevalent in the community emanating from the Shongweni Landfill.

We know the smell has been unpleasant for residents in the surrounding communities. For that we apologise. Please be assured that we're doing everything we practically can, well beyond what we've been asked to do, to try and fix the problem. We really do care about our community and are doing everything in our power to be a good neighbour. It's in our interests to work with the community to find a solution.