

A malodorous mess

Site run by controversial CEO touted to receive toxic waste

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ENVIRONMENTALISTS are worried the toxic stench emitting from a controversial landfill will simply be transplanted to another community, just moving the problems elsewhere.

On Tuesday, the KwaZulu-Natal department of environmental affairs said it was suspending the operating licence for the EnviroServ dumpsite in Shongweni because of the “significant sources of odour” the company has failed to deal with.

The site handles about 14 000 tons of refuse a month, including industrial chemicals, condemned foods, contaminated soils and general household waste, from about 1 000 clients. Communities surrounding the landfill have blamed the emissions for poor health, including burning eyes and throats, and respiratory problems.

Although EnviroServ indicated it was likely to head to court today to challenge the suspension of its licence, a warning was sounded that closure of the dump could shift the mess to a different community.

Environmentalist Bobby Peek, of Groundwork, said the government did not have the capacity to deal with hazardous waste.

“If you don’t deal with toxic waste

at source, and industry keeps dumping it, you will have problems throughout [the country],” he said.

Industry experts and the department said the most likely site to inherit the Shongweni waste problem would be KwaDukuza.

The Dolphin Coast Landfill Management site is run by CEO Olivier Meyer, a man who has courted controversy.

“If you don’t deal with toxic waste at source, you will have problems

In November 2009, the *Sunday Times* reported that the Green Scorpions bust Wasteman, which was run by Meyer at the time, for dumping infectious medical waste, including bloody swabs, used needles, vials and pills, in the backyard of a Welkom brick factory.

Meyer was CEO of Wasteman, a position from which he was fired when criminal charges were laid

against him.

Although he appeared in court about seven months later, and the case was taken off the roll in 2011, the environmental affairs department deputy director-general for chemicals and waste management, Mark Gordon, said the investigation was complete and extra in-

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formation requested by the Director for Public Prosecutions had been supplied.

Provincial spokesman Phaladi Shuping said the matter was under consideration. "It is in the hands of a prosecutor [senior advocate] in the directorate's office. She has not made a decision because she still has to consult other stakeholders," said Shuping.

Asked who stood to benefit from the closure of Shongweni, the Institute for Waste Management South Africa said Dolphin Coast Landfill Management was the "most likely" because of its prox-

imity to Durban.

The only other landfills that could accept this type of waste were in Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

"A financial benefit may result should the waste go to Dolphin's site as generators will have to pay, as they did at Shongweni, for the disposal of waste," said institute president Jan Palm.

Attempts to get comment from Meyer, who is overseas, were unsuccessful.

But company director James Ndebele said Dolphin would not comment on the saga given the legal action between a competitor, EnviroServ, and the department.

When questions were asked about Meyer's background, Ndebele threatened a lawsuit against Times Media.

"At the outset, the allegations against Mr Meyer were not only trumped up, but defamatory, malicious and without merit and/or foundation," said Ndebele.

Palm said while it was aware of Meyer's background, it had no issue with the Dolphin operation.

"If a landfill is designed, approved and constructed according to legislation, and it is operated according to the applicable legislation, the [institute] has no objection to the site's use," said Palm.

Gordon's department was also

unconcerned.

"The Department audits the site regularly and it is complying with the licence conditions," he said.

EnviroServ CEO Dean Thompson said the company was being unfairly targeted.

"We have given the department and community clear evidence of several gaseous pollutants which do not originate from EnviroServ.

"We feel not all our information has been adequately considered. While we await results of their investigations into these other odour sources, EnviroServ remains committed to resolving our contribution to the odour," he said.

Gordon denied this claim.