

Sasol hopes to get a breather

● Petrochemical giant wants to postpone compliance with new standards of environmental health and safety

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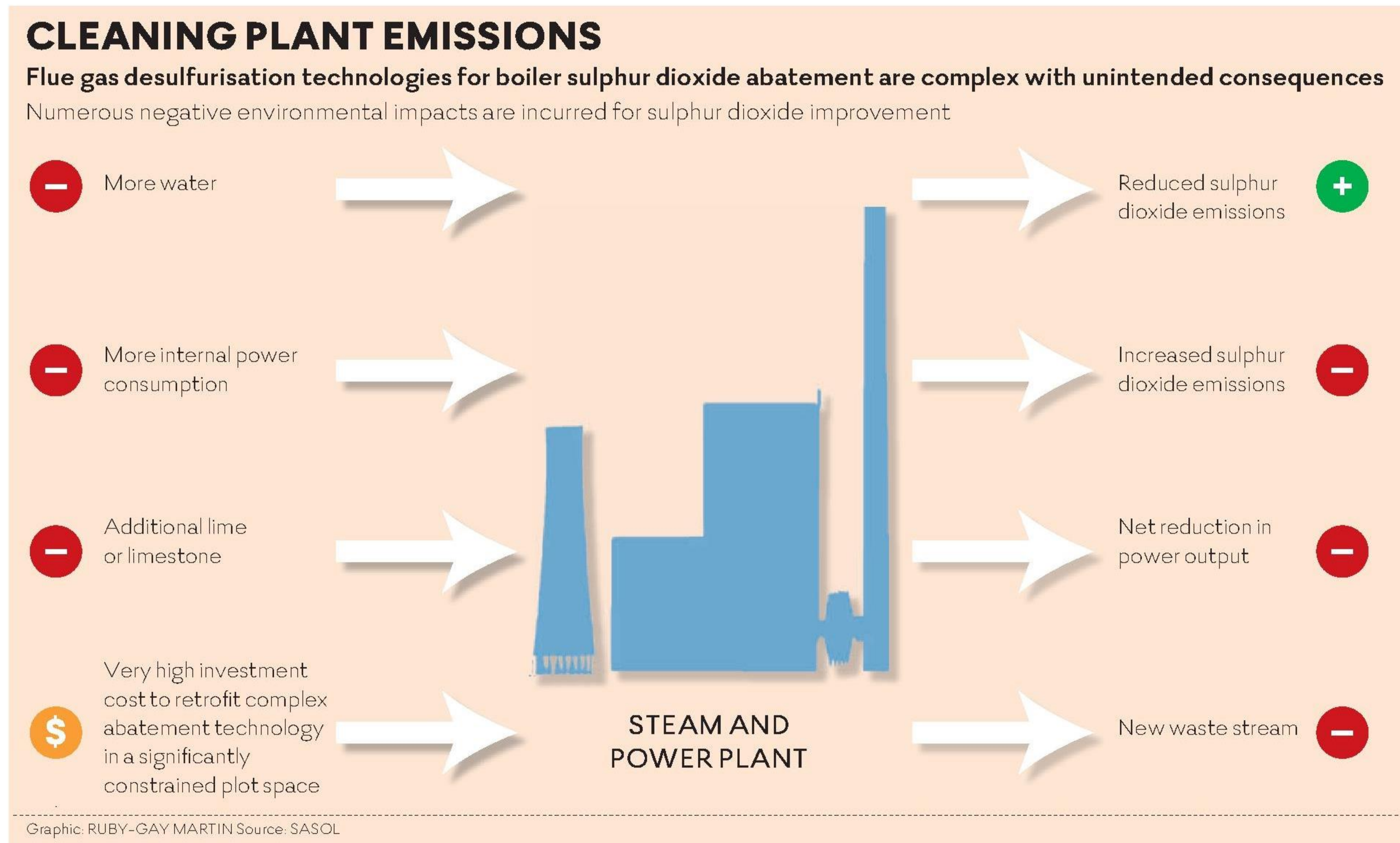
Energy Writer

Oil and chemicals giant Sasol will start public consultations next year as part of a process of applying to postpone compliance with some of the new air-quality standards applicable by 2020, Sasol's executive vice-president of Southern African operations Bernard Klingenberg said on Wednesday.

Environmentalists and local communities in the Vaal Triangle and Highveld have complained for decades about air pollution by heavy industry, mainly Sasol, ArcelorMittal SA and Eskom. All three entities operate old plants, built before current air-quality standards were put in place, and have argued it will be expensive and not entirely effective to retrofit clean air technology.

Klingenberg said Sasol invested R20bn over the past 15 years on environmental improvement programmes. But it has challenges in meeting the new 2020 standards in two particular areas: its sulphur dioxide (SO²) and hydrogen sulphide (H²S) emissions. It would be able to meet most of the new standards by 2025.

At Secunda, putting desulphurisation equipment on the



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sioned the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to study what the sources are and the health effect. Sasol was contributing resources to the study.

Bobby Peek, a director of environmental justice organisation groundWork, said he had anticipated Sasol would apply for these postponements.

He believed Sasol's hurdle in complying with the new air quality standards was not technological but that it was not prepared to make the necessary investment.

The problem with particulate emissions was that the department did not have the necessary monitoring or modelling equipment to identify the culprits, which made it easy for industries to point fingers at everyone else, Peek said. It was possible to pinpoint the main sources, as groundWork had shown in its work around Engen's Durban refinery several years ago.

Klingenberg said Sasol had to submit its application for a postponement by April 1 2019, to be considered by national and provincial authorities. An independent party would be appointed to manage public consultations and it would be widely advertised.

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boilers was particularly difficult because they have to run at high temperatures which makes it impossible to implement some of the available flue gas technologies. The only suitable desulphurisation technology takes up as much space as the boilers themselves and uses more water and power. It also

requires a lot of lime to be trucked in, which adds to environmental problems.

As part of its postponement application Sasol will demonstrate that its SO² emissions are about half the contribution to total SO² in the area, well below the ambient air quality limits.

Sasol's H²S emissions, which

are associated with a "rotten egg smell", have fallen steadily since 2006 as a result of investments it made, Klingenberg said. Its H²S emissions were now within international benchmarks from a health perspective but were difficult to eliminate completely because the plants emitted a large volume of offgas with low

concentrations of H²S and unique impurities.

Particulate matter remained a problem for local communities but it was generated by various sources including industry, domestic fuel and waste burning, Klingenberg said.

The Department of Environmental Affairs has commis-