

Eskom power stations kill thousands a year - UK expert

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Air pollution from coal power stations causes disease and kills thousands of South Africans every year, says UK expert Dr Mike Holland. Air pollution from coal-fired power stations kills more than 2,200 South Africans every year, and causes thousands of cases of bronchitis and asthma in adults and children annually. This costs the country more than R30 billion annually, through hospital admissions and lost working days. These are some of the findings of a recent study into SA's air quality by the renowned environmental expert.

These are some of the shocking findings to emerge from a presentation by UK-based air quality and health expert Dr Mike Holland[2] who visited South Africa last week.

Dr Holland presented his report to Department of Environmental Affairs on 6 September, and to members of the Environmental Affairs and Health Portfolio Committees on Friday, 8 September 2017.

In 2016, environmental justice organisation groundWork commissioned Dr Holland to assess the health impacts and associated economic costs of current emissions of air pollutants from coal-fired power stations in South Africa. His findings are contained in a report entitled Health impacts of coal fired power plants in South Africa.[3] In essence, the report estimates that

the following impacts are attributable to air pollution from the burning of coal in South Africa:

- 2 239 deaths per year: 157 from lung cancer; 1 110 from ischaemic heart disease; 73 from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; 719 from strokes; and 180 from lower respiratory infection
- 2 781 cases of chronic bronchitis per year in adults
- 9 533 cases of bronchitis per year in children aged 6 to 12
- 2 379 hospital admissions per year
- 3 972 902 days of restricted activity per year
- 94 680 days of asthma symptoms per year in children aged 5 to 19
- 996 628 lost working days per year
- The total costs associated with these impacts exceed USD2 billion per year.

These numbers exclude the significant impacts from air pollution from mining (such as coal dust), transport of coal, and contamination of water.

Dr Holland's report also estimates the health impacts of individual Eskom power stations based on their emissions. His report finds that the most lethal Eskom power stations are:

1. Medupi: 364 deaths (also with 453 cases of chronic bronchitis, 1552 cases of bronchitis in children ages 6-19, 15 412 asthma symptom days in children, all at a cost of more than \$386 million per year)
2. Matimba: 262 deaths per year
3. Kendal: 210 deaths per year
4. Lethabo: 204 deaths per year
5. Matla and Tutuka: 192 deaths per year each

[Click here](#) to see a short video in which Dr Holland discusses these and other key findings from his report.

Dr Holland told decision-makers this week that these impacts are material, and urged that they be taken into account in future energy policy in South Africa.

Earlier this year, CER, groundWork and Earthlife Africa Johannesburg (which make up of the Life After Coal/Impilo Ngaphandle Kwamalahle campaign), made submissions on the draft base case for the new Integrated Resource Plan, arguing that health costs should have been considered in the scenario planning by the Department of Energy.^[4] The Life After Coal Campaign, together with Greenpeace Africa, also criticised the CSIR for not adequately considering these – and other – costs in their “alternative” IRP published in March 2017.^[5]

"In the face of findings like this, the ongoing failure to act to reduce the impacts of coal-fired power on the health of South Africans, particularly those living around Eskom's power stations on the Highveld, starts to look like deliberate facilitation of the violation of people's environmental rights, and their right to life," says Melissa Fourie, executive director of the Centre for Environmental Rights. "If government fails to address this situation, affected communities will have no option but to approach the courts for relief."

"SA is at a unique stage in energy production. We need to consider how we use our current electricity surplus to ensure a just transition away from coal power that kills people, and ensuring that people who currently do not have access to energy, gain access to clean, healthy energy. We also need to start decommissioning dirty coal power stations, and support the creation of new electricity industry which is cleaner, healthier, more energy efficient and more labour intensive. Let's not lose this unique opportunity to create a healthier energy for a healthier people, for a healthier South Africa," says Bobby Peek, director of groundWork.

Notes:

[1] \$2.37 billion annually converted at an exchange rate of ZAR12,78:USD1.

[2] Dr Holland is a freelance consultant based in the United Kingdom, and an Honorary Fellow of Imperial College London. He advises various European national governments, the European Commission, the World Bank, the OECD and the World Health Organisation. He is also a member of the UK Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants, and contributed to a 2016 report by the Royal College of Physicians entitled Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution on the health impacts of air pollution in the United Kingdom.

[3] <https://cer.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Annexure-Health-impacts-of-coal-fired-generation-in-South-Africa-310317.pdf>

[4] <https://cer.org.za/news/prepare-for-battle-sas-draft-energy-plans-must-respect-and-realise-constitutional-rights>

[5] <https://cer.org.za/news/joint-media-release-cost-of-health-and-water-impacts-of-coal-still-missing-from-energy-plans>

<https://wwwacts.co.za/news/blog/2017/09/eskom-power-stations-kill-thousands-a-year-uk-expert>

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