

GROUNDWORK

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groundwork



environmental justice action in Southern Africa

groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organisation working primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in Southern Africa.

groundWork seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Southern Africa through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance. groundWork places particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices.

groundWork's current project areas are: air quality, waste (including environmental health) and corporate accountability.

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AFFILIATIONS:

groundWork is affiliated to the following international organisations:

Health Care Without Harm

International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International

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Cover photo: Waste Pickers unite in a national meeting hosted by groundWork.
Picture by groundWork.



From the smoke stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

In September government will finally gazette air emission standards. This is a victory for civil society considering that over the last 15 years big industry, and in particular the petrochemical industry, has been resisting this. This industrial lobby was so powerful that when the first draft of the present Air Quality Act was submitted to parliament in 2004, it was void of text on emission standards. Civil society challenged this, and the law was changed.

An anecdote on this issue is in order. In 1995, at the height of the Engen struggle, the Engen Environmental Manager of the time, Trevor Chorn, sent through a message to the community: We will reduce pollution if the ambient pollution level exceeds a health standard. It must be noted that then South Africa did not have ambient air health standards, so polluted air was not illegal, despite the interim Constitution. As early campaigners on environmental justice issues we thought that we had arrived. They are going to reduce. A victory in a few months' old battle. After some debate we, needless to say, soon figured out that without emissions standards having ambient standards the standards are meaningless. A message was sent back to Engen: Put it in your chimney and smoke it. We want emission reductions not only when there are ambient air pollution violations but as a general rule. The street battle with Engen continued for another three years before they agreed to this. It has, however, taken us a further decade and more to see the results in law. How slowly the wheels of justice turn.

While we are in a celebratory mood, there is loads to reflect upon that was positive in the last period. We were fortunate to premier possibly the most watched

web based movie, *The Story of Stuff*, at the Khanya Winter School in August this year. It was a resounding success. Soon after this Annie Leonard, the presenter of *The Story of Stuff* as well as an old comrade, visited South Africa and we are now working on dubbing *The Story of Stuff* into isiZulu and isiSotho. In the various forums in which I have had the opportunity to participate, *The Story of Stuff* is often mentioned as a reference. Annie is presently busy with the book version and we are all looking forward to it in 2010.

As the big jamboree of another Conference of the Parties on the UN Climate Change protocol approaches, in December 2009 in snowy Copenhagen, people locally are gearing their resistance to highlight the improbability of the UN curbing big industrial pollution. In response and preparation for this the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, together with its local partners, pulled together a group of more than 500 local residents and school children in late August to highlight to the world that the drivers of climate change - large energy consuming industry, the petrochemical industry and huge government infrastructure projects designed to grease corporate extraction of our resources - are impacting upon community people right now, not in the future. Under the banner of 'resist, mobilise and transform' people spoke about their experiences and called upon government to govern for the people and not for the profits of corporations.

On this note, at A Rocha's – an international Christian nature conservation organisation – local people gathered around from Pietermaritzburg, Sleepy Hollow as it is known, where we are based, and met to discuss the environmental and ecological justice



future of Sleepy Hollow. What was very comforting about the event was that it started off with Allen Goddard, Director of A Rocha South Africa, clearly articulating that a new economic model is needed if we are to stem the tide of environmental injustices and ecological destruction. This message is being strongly taken up by the religious fraternity as well, and groundWork has been involved with various religious denominations over the last three months who want to know more about climate change and environmental justice.

Parallel to these events civil society in South Africa is in a process of negotiating how, as South African communities, we can be part of the Climate Justice Now! movement that is growing globally and is calling for positive transformative change now, based upon justice for all people. It is hoped that by the time Copenhagen happens we will be organised as a collective in South Africa with a strong community voice.

Also in this last period we have been fortunate to be able to bring together more than 100 waste pickers and community organisation representatives to reflect on how people can take control over 'waste' as a resource and ensure that privatisation by big corporates and 'political connections' do not lead to a loss of livelihoods for people who are working on waste sites, earning a legitimate livelihood. Sadly groundWork's invitation to the Department of Water Affairs and Environment's Chief Director Nolwazi Cobbinah to address the gathering on new waste management proposals was ignored. An invitation was also sent to the new Minister, who also did not attend.

Despite various attempts to engage with and get information from government on ArcelorMittal, groundWork has received no joy from government. The collusion between government and ArcelorMittal thickens. It has been made clear by ArcelorMittal that they will not release the Environmental Master Plan, for it is not in their best interests.

We have presented our case to allies in the European Union. As a result, in September, we are working with the European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ) which brings together national platforms of

civil society organisations to campaign for Corporate Accountability. Together we are planning a fact finding mission of journalists to the ArcelorMittal operations in South Africa, focusing on Vanderbijlpark, to better understand ArcelorMittal's operations, government's responses and the impact on people's lives. This follows up on the Liberia fact finding mission that VEJA participated in.

During this fact finding mission participants from Kazakhstan, the European Union and the United States joined VEJA to understand more about the ArcelorMittal operations in Liberia. The visit focused not only on the proposed ArcelorMittal operations but also on alleged bribery. ArcelorMittal stated that it donated these trucks for 'development initiatives associated with their recently announced Poverty Reduction Strategy'. Instead of being used for development it is alleged that politicians are using these trucks in Monrovia as personal vehicles

The results of this fact finding mission, together with research into European Corporate practice in South Africa, Columbia and India, will be presented in six different EU countries as well as the UN in Geneva in October.

We have worked hard at getting all the role players involved in this fact finding mission in order that the European audience can better understand the impact of ArcelorMittal, a Luxemburg based company, on people in the South. There has, however, been reluctance from the Gauteng provincial government and from the air pollution and enforcement directorate of the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs. Surprisingly, ArcelorMittal has agreed to meet. The unions, as well as the local council and local mayor, have also agreed to meet with the fact finding mission.

This could be an important opportunity to place on record the work that government has been doing, for some of it is positive, so why they are reluctant escapes me.

On this note,

Aluta Continua



U.S. e-Waste Lands in South Africa

By Rico Euripidou

An illegal shipment of e-waste from America does not stir up much excitement in government circles

On the 1st of May 2009 the Basal Action Network¹, the global NGO working on monitoring the hazardous waste trade, once again uncovered an international waste scam. BAN discovered that a shipment of hazardous electronic waste collected in the USA on behalf of a charitable organisation called the Humane Society as part of a local recycling initiative was destined for dumping in South Africa and China².

BAN then took action by notifying our Competent Authority for the Basel Convention in SA, The Department of Water and Environmental Affairs (DWEA), the directorates of International Co-

Operation and Resources and Environmental Quality and Protection. They also informed groundWork as the BAN partner in South Africa. groundWork followed up in the ensuing weeks to track the ship to its docking date and time in the Durban harbour.

groundWork additionally notified the e-Waste Association of South Africa (eWASA) and various other government departments including the South African Revenue Service. All measures, it seemed, had been put in place to give effect to the Basel Convention and mitigate this shipment of e-waste into our country. What emerged, however, over the next five weeks was a picture of apathy, mixed understanding

MSC TRACKING & TRACING Enter B/L or Container nr: **MSCU7870035** **Search**

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MSCU7870035					
Container	Location	Description	Date	Vessel	Voyage
Type 40' HIGH CUBE	DURBAN, ZA	Estimated Time of Arrival	26/05/2009		
Shipped On 01/05/2009	BALTIMORE, MD, US	Loaded	01/05/2009	MSC ROBERTA	5023
Print details	Alerts by email	Alerts by RSS	BALTIMORE, MD, US	Gate In Full	16/04/2009
			BALTIMORE, MD, US	Empty to Shipper	14/04/2009

Tracking results provided by MSC on 06.05.2009 at 00:57 CET

This is the container ticket for the shipment.

¹ The BAN works to confront of toxic industrial waste is currently meaning to the Basel Convention, "affluent" from rich to poorer countries. BAN works towards implementing electronic waste warehouses to foreign developing Convention.

² Research Report: "The EarthECycle Pittsburgh Recycling Scam" is available at: www.ban.org/Library/PittsburghScam.pdf



Lead Story

e-mail to: The Competent Authority Desk for Basel Convention in South Africa:

The Basel Action Network has begun working with officials around the world to better control illegal exports of hazardous electronic waste from the United States. As you may be aware, as the United States is not a Party to the Basel Convention, imports of hazardous electronic wastes from the United States into the territories of Basel Parties such as South Africa is illegal (Basel Art. 4, para. 5) due to the Party to non-Party trade prohibition. Also, the importation of hazardous wastes into the continent of Africa is illegal under the Bamako Convention.

Nevertheless, many exporters are shipping electronic waste from the United States to African countries because the US does not control such shipments. Many of these shipments are some of the most difficult wastes to process and certainly the ones often worth the least in terms of resale or recovery value.

BAN has begun helping governments to better control this contraband. We monitor the loading and transport of ocean-going containers from electronic waste warehouses to foreign destinations. If the shipment is likely to be illegal we alert authorities starting with the competent authority of the Basel Convention. Recently we have been working with officials in Hong Kong and they have seized shipments, and taken legal action against the consignees and turned the shipments back to the exporter following legal proceedings. We provide the container number, the ship name, date of arrival and the discharge port. They turn this information over to their customs officials and seize the shipment. So far the program has been very successful.

Today we have found the first such shipment of those that we have been tracking appears to be heading to South Africa. Here is the information on this shipment:

1. Container #: MSCU 7870035
2. Port of Destination: Durban, South Africa
3. Estimated Date of Arrival: 26 May 2009
4. Name of Ship: MSC ROBERTA
5. Voyage Number: S023
6. Contents: Shipment was identified during loading as waste computer monitors (without protective packaging)

You should have time to alert Customs officials to act. BAN does not have access to the bills of lading listing the consignees. It would be wise to have Basel experts like yourselves there upon arrival when the container is opened to be able to identify the waste. Be aware that some unscrupulous actors have characterized electronic waste as non-waste (due to alleged functionality). However we are certain that these wastes have not been tested prior to export and likewise lack of protective packaging indicates little effort applied to ensuring protection of material as goods. Be aware that the Basel Convention Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative Working Group on Transboundary movement agreed that untested equipment must be presumed to be a waste.

We expect the following Basel listed hazardous wastes to be in the cargo by Annex VIII number:

Mixed Electronic waste and scrap (hazardous due to lead content in circuit boards)

A1180: Waste electrical and electronic assemblies or scrap[1] containing components such as accumulators and other batteries included on list A, mercury-switches, glass from cathode-ray tubes and other activated glass and PCB-capacitors, or contaminated with Annex I constituents (e.g., cadmium, mercury, lead, polychlorinated biphenyl) to an extent that they possess any of the characteristics contained in Annex III (note the related entry on list B B1110)[2]

Computer Monitors (hazardous due to lead content in glass and phosphors that often contain cadmium)

A2010: Glass waste from cathode-ray tubes and other activated glasses.

We have copied this message to Mr. Bobby Peek of groundWork in South Africa as he is part of our BAN network of civil society watchdog organizations. Thank you so much. Please acknowledge receipt of this message and let us know what you are able to assist in helping prevent illegal trafficking in hazardous waste. And please let us know if we can be of further assistance in any way. We look forward to continued cooperation on these matters".



of roles and responsibilities and legal incompetence to properly deal with this illegal shipment of waste into our country.

To begin with the DEAT's Pollution and Waste Management Directorate were reluctant to take ownership of the incident. Repeated correspondence was not responded to leaving groundWork uncertain whether anybody was in fact tracking the incident at all, and when some measure of information exchange occurred it did not appear as if the Directorate was interested in the matter, which seemed very strange considering that this presented them with an ideal opportunity to demonstrate inter-stakeholder cooperation, preparedness and good governance.

Eventually the Chief Directorate: Regulatory Services, Enforcement Directorate took some measure of control following the intervention of eWASA and, since receiving this alert, began working with SARS to investigate the consignment. Environmental Quality and Protection did not inform its enforcement directorate.

Twenty four hours before the ship was to dock at the Durban harbour, groundWork informed the Chief Director: Pollution and Waste Management, Nolwazi Cobbinah, of the time of docking. The shipment could have been stopped in Durban but due to bureaucratic delay and bungling the shipment was transported across land for more than 500 kilometers to Johannesburg.

SARS confirmed that the shipment had been cleared at their Johannesburg office on the 22nd of May 2009 and the Directorate obtained information on the importer which was in possession of a legitimate permit for the import. Not surprisingly, during the investigation in relation to this alert they identified a number of gaps in the way in which we are able to execute our obligations in terms of Basel Convention.

The e-Waste Association of South Africa explained their participation as follows:

"When groundWork first sent the BAN alert on to the e-Waste Association of South Africa (eWASA) in May 09, we immediately contacted Frances Craigie, Acting Director Enforcement, and Timothy Fasheun at the KZN Department of Environment to urgently follow up the matter. Once the shipment landed in Durban we spoke to Francis again who assured us that while it would go to City Deep it would be detained and inspected there.

eWASA strongly opposes illegal transboundary movement of e-waste into the country, while shipments of waste destined for recycling facilities where it can be handled safely, especially from other African countries who lack treatment facilities, should be considered on a case by case basis by the authorities. eWASA is willing to work closely with the Department of Environmental Affairs as well as the Basel Focal Point to ensure that legal shipments are treated properly."



Bags piled high with imported computer components waiting to be burned in the burn houses. Guiyu, China. May 2008 *2008 Basel Action Network (BAN)



Lead Story

Currently working on Standards for e-Waste Management facilities in South Africa eWASA will publish these draft standards by the end of August for comment. Once adopted eWASA will audit, in a first phase, all facilities that are already members

Woman about to smash a cathode ray tube from a computer monitor in order to remove the copper laden yoke at the end of the funnel. The glass is laden with lead but the biggest hazard from this is the inhalation of the highly toxic phosphor dust coating inside. Monitor glass is later dumped in irrigation canals and along the river where it leaches lead into the groundwater.
 Guiyu, China.
 December 2001.
 2006 Basel Action Network



of eWASA (by end 09) and, as a second phase, companies that treat e-waste but that are not yet eWASA members (by April 2010). While membership is encouraged it is voluntary and can already serve as an indication of a company's willingness to work with eWASA and government to ensure that its treatment or dismantling facility is safe and can handle e-waste in an environmentally responsible manner.

The eWASA Standards are based on European Standards taking into account the South Africa legal requirements as well as specific limitations in our environment. While the Standards will be a minimum requirement for eWASA accreditation companies should strive to meet European WEEE standards to ensure we run world-class recycling facilities locally.

The Swiss Materials and Technology Laboratories (EMPA), world-renowned as the leader in e-waste

knowledge, assisted eWASA with a Train the Trainer workshop to train e-waste auditors for the South African system. For more information on eWASA and its programmes see www.ewasa.org or contact them at info@ewasa.org.

The American Environmental Protection Agency filed a legal Complaint and Compliance Order in the first week of June against EarthCycle, the electronic waste handler for several charity e-waste collection events held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania³. However, even though this shipment had been intercepted and found to be e-waste, the South African authorities are not in a position to ensure that the shipment is returned to its sender. The US EPA, who originally indicated a willingness to assist and facilitate the return to sender, are now not able to assist further because the exporter has become embroiled in a third party legal dispute in the USA and the EPA do not consider it their mandate to arbitrate. Meanwhile, in South Africa, the e-waste shipment has been impounded, but there appears to be no immediate solution to its fate just yet.

Across the globe in Guiyu, China, the city has become the world's digital scrap heap even though the importation of e-waste to China is illegal. Under the guise of recycling, e-waste brokers ship the United States-discarded computers and dump their environmental problem on China, ignoring the embargo. Local environmental activist Wu Song sums up the local situation emphatically when he makes the following comment "I don't think this is recycling. They (the recyclers) ignore the environment."⁴

Worryingly a recent BAN study found that up to 75 percent of "reusable" electronic goods are obsolete, do not work or are destroyed in transit: and even products that can be repaired generate waste because technicians usually replace broken parts rather than fixing them: "...The reality is that you cannot just 'plop down' a high-tech facility in a developing country and expect it to operate safely... Ultimately, the solution to the problem of electronic waste is to design better, cleaner products with fewer hazardous materials and less waste generally" says Jim Puckett from BAN.⁵

³ EPA Legal Complaint: www.ban.org/Library/EarthECycleComplaint.pdf

⁴ quoted by Tim Johnson from the News Observer, 28 May 2009 <http://www.newsobserver.com/1573/story/1544572.html>

⁵ Special Report: Business of Green: Leading Africans to Responsible Recycling By ERICA GIES, New York Times, 26 May 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/25/business/energy-environment/25iht-rbogafrica.html?_r=1



Detecting Metals and Particulate Matter

By Siziwe Khanyile

New technology will allow communities to monitor heavy metals and particulate matter within their environments

On the 22nd and 23rd of June 2009, groundWork facilitated community training on metals and particulate matter detection. The Trainers were Denny Larson of Bucket Brigade fame, from Global Community Monitor in the USA, and Shweta Narayan, an air pollution activist from Community Environmental Monitoring in Cuddalore, India. Community representatives from south Durban, Rustenburg, Sasolburg, Steel Valley and Boipatong in the Vaal Triangle, and Middleburg attended.

For a number of years, groundWork motivated for government to monitor for mercury which is a by-product of the coal incineration processes. Although this is happening in eThekini and in the Highveld Priority Area, much more needs to be done at other pollution hotspots nationally.

The aim of the training was to train people that campaign for clean air at a community level on the use of air pollution monitoring tools. The monitoring equipment (the Mini-Vol) detects heavy metals and small particles of dust from platinum mining, coal mining, cement and iron and steel facilities so that communities are better able to understand the toxins they are exposed to and to motivate government to respond.

groundWork and Denny Larson introduced the Bucket Brigade to South African communities in 2000. This enabled communities to test for a wide variety of volatile organic compounds such as benzene as well as sulphur. The success of the Bucket Brigade was that government and industry recognised the existence of these dangerous toxic chemicals in the air and decided to monitor

for them, and government is developing standards so that people are not exposed to dangerous and unacceptable levels of these pollutants.

groundWork hopes to achieve the same result with the heavy metals and particulate testers.

For three days after the training, Shweta and Denny were hosted by several communities in pollution hotspots across the country from Middleburg to Rustenburg, the Vaal and Durban, to share their experiences in the field of community air pollution monitoring. They also got to see, smell and feel the magnitude of the pollution problems we face in South Africa.

Because the constitution guarantees an environment that is not harmful to people's health and well-being, any pollutant that is deemed harmful to health must be actively and decisively dealt with by government. Through the use of the Mini-Vol groundWork plans, at the very least, to highlight the problems and to lobby for government intervention where it is required.



Shweta Narayan (far left) and Denny Larson (left back) facilitated a successful community workshop which will enable community people to monitor heavy metals and particulate matter in their environments. Picture by groundWork



More Dirty Oil Refineries For South Africa

By Bobby Peek and Jesse Burton¹

As South Africa sinks under the burden of its own climate change legacy, the country being one of the top per capita greenhouse gas emitters in the world, it seeks to intensify this ecological onslaught by increasing fuel production in order that we can drive more cars as we all aspire to middleclass outputs.

Two main production processes are in the pipeline.

In the pristine Waterberg area the apartheid-created Sasol, the world's largest Coal to Liquid (CtL) manufacturer, together with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), is undertaking a feasibility study to place a plant in this area, where there are abundant coal reserves. The IDC was created in 1940 and is a self-financing, national Development Finance Institution. It was established to promote economic growth and industrial development in South Africa. The South African state is the single shareholder. Sasol's Secunda CtL plant is said to have the notorious distinction of being the largest greenhouse-gas emitting development in the world. It is alarming that Sasol and the South African state is involved in furthering our climate change legacy. This development is going to cost around R200 billion and the IDC will invest around R30 billion Rand in this venture. Considering the industrial waste lands of Sasolburg and Secunda, it would be interesting to see what will be come of local peoples' health and ecology.

But this is not where the interest of the IDC stops. Geoffrey Quena, the CEO of the IDC, has also indicated that there is interest in joining Petro SA, the South African government's liquid fuel company, to develop a 400 000 barrel per day oil refinery in the failed Coega venture in the Eastern Cape.

For a time it appeared as though the anchor tenant for the Industrial Development Zone would be an aluminium smelter owned by Alcan (now Rio Tinto), but this faced widespread criticism because of the environmental pollution and high electricity requirements of aluminium smelting (at a time when South Africa is facing a severe shortage in electricity supply levels). It is likely that the aluminium smelter is no more, but it has been replaced by plans to build a

new oil refinery at the IDZ, operated by PetroSA, the state oil company, with Venezuelan dirty crude as a feed stock.

The refinery is expected to cost in the region of \$11 billion and, problematically, statements made by PetroSA contradict each other on the numbers of jobs to be created. For example: a Press Release by PetroSA on the 18th of February 2008 ("PetroSA ups the ante in plans for the Coega crude oil refinery") states that, "Project Mthombo will be one of the biggest post-2010 investments in South Africa. It is estimated that the project will generate about 5 000 direct jobs during operations and 20 000 indirect jobs".

However, another press release by PetroSA (undated – "PetroSA puts out multi-million Rand tender for Strategic Engineering Partner for Coega Oil Refinery") states that "Project Mthombo will be one of the biggest post-2010 investments in South Africa. It is estimated that the project will generate about 8 000 direct jobs during operations and 39 000 indirect jobs." More recent reports have stated that 25 000 direct and indirect jobs will be created. (Business Report, 9th of December 2008).

Confusion reigns about how many jobs and what the economic spinoff would be. But what will never be in dispute is that, as South Africa continues to dabble in the 'bottom of the barrel' and the 'dirtiest of the dirtiest' fossil fuels, we are going to have environmental justice impacts that we will never be able to mitigate against. Ask the drought stricken subsistence farmers in Africa and the people of south Durban, Sasol, Table View/Milnerton and Secunda.

It is not possible to quantify the cost to the environment and peoples' lives as they face the onslaught of daily pollution. Indeed, this whole CtL and megarefinery process is in contradiction to the LTMS that cabinet approved - so our industrial policy is already veering off where it should be, and we are not doing any work on transport energy efficiency, which would probably negate the need for another refinery. And who do you suppose is going to build the pipelines all the way down to Coega? ¶

¹ Jesse Burton was an intern with groundWork in late 2008. Jesse is now doing a masters in climate change at the University of Cape Town.



Keeping Resources in the Ground

By Siziwe Khanyile

Keep the Oil in the Soil! Keep the Coal in the Hole!
 Similar calls have been made to keep gas, bitumen, tar sands and other fossil fuels underground. This is the struggle of several campaigns, NGOs and communities worldwide and most intensely in the global South.

For a long time there has been talk of the “resource curse” when referring to countries with an abundance of natural resources, but plagued with poor economic growth, poor development in other sectors of the economy, unstable and corrupt governments, forced removals of people from their lands, and a general lack of service delivery and a depreciation of quality of life for fenceline and host communities where the resource is being extracted. As a result, some civil society groups have made calls to their governments to keep fossil fuels underground. These calls were made realising the threat to the environment and humanity in the form of climate change and other impacts.

Recently, I attended the Oilwatch Africa General Assembly in Accra, Ghana, which was attended by activists, academics, attorneys and community based campaigners from across Africa. At this meeting we deliberated on the idea of keeping the oil in the soil with the aim of stopping the expansion of the socially destructive and environmentally damaging oil activity that has been evident in many oil producing countries, especially in Africa. Holding the Assembly in Ghana was very timely as oil has recently been discovered there.

In his opening address, Rev Nnimmo Bassey of Environmental Rights Action and Chair of Friends of the Earth International highlighted the fact that the fossil fuel civilisation has been built on crude oil, tar sands and coal, and that the benefits of keeping the Oil in the Soil are numerous.

The assembly agreed that, if carbon is kept underground, we have a solution for climate change, no more oil spills and gas flares, no destruction of communities and their environments, no socio-economic ills related to oil field activities, citizens will

have a direct stake in how national revenues are spent because they would be taxed and would therefore expect more accountability and transparency from their governments, corruption in the oil blocks allocation exercises would cease, oil bunkering would cease, and safe and clean environments and reduction and ultimately elimination of violent conflicts in the oil fields would result.

The proposed strategy was to develop a realisation among Africans that there is no future in crude oil as a major revenue earner, that non-fossil fuel alternatives should be sought and the development of other sectors of the economy should be encouraged. Rather than exploit new oil fields with the resulting pollution, human rights abuses and malformed political system, oil should be kept under the soil and a fund should be established to which citizens could contribute as tax while international aid agencies and other countries could also make a contribution. This would bring additional revenues to whatever the country makes from current oil activities. Keeping oil in the soil has been tried and tested in Ogoniland and it is a very real possibility, not just for oil but for other potentially destructive fossil fuels.

In South Africa, groundWork and other civil society organisations are monitoring Eskom’s building of coal fired power stations and are challenging the huge planned investments in coal-based energy and coal to liquids.

As part of the civil society response to our government’s planned fossil fuel intensive energy plan and in response to climate threats, civil society groups in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg and surrounding areas have embarked on a process of discussion and consultation on developing a Climate Justice Now! network (CJN) in South Africa. CJN calls for leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing instead in appropriate energy- efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy.

We look forward to participating in a vibrant South African civil society engagement and action and mobilising to keeping resources in the ground.



Eskom and the World Bank

By Siziwe Khanyile

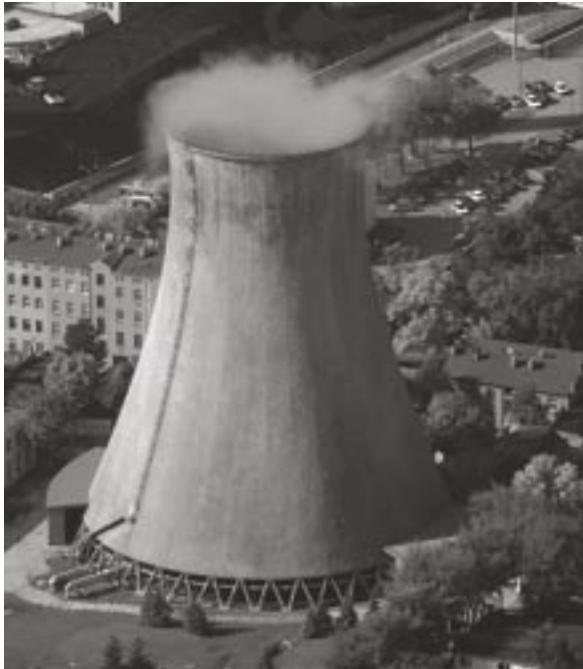
groundWork has commissioned research into the proposed five billion dollar loan by the World Bank to Eskom

groundWork's Climate Change focus is mainly to understand energy and how the 'quest for energy' by the South African government is taking us down an unsustainable path.

When groundWork learned of Eskom's energy expansion plans using loans from the World Bank to the tune of \$5 billion, our antennae were raised. The loan will be one of the largest investments made by the Bank on the African continent. We were concerned that the loan comes at a time of immense focus on climate change when, strategically, we ought to be moving towards sustainable energy sources.

As a result, we embarked on a detailed study where we highlighted the irony of the World Bank trying to display itself as 'green', while it still actively pushes the fossil fuel industry; and the ongoing position by

A cooling tower for a coal-fired power station.



the South African government to continually promote fossil fuels as a means of energy that 'the people' will eventually pay for, while it benefits the profits of corporations, and how this will never get us, as a country, to meaningfully play a role in addressing our climate change impact.

The loan

Globally, the Bank has claimed a leading position on funding sustainable development and addressing climate change in particular and, amongst other things, the bank manages the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and is a key player in developing the global carbon market.

According to the Bank, the purpose of the loan is to help Eskom and the electricity sector "achieve financial stability, increase generation capacity and efficiency, and adopt a low-carbon trajectory". But, there is nothing 'low carbon' about Eskom's new build which is based on carbon intensive coal fired power. Nor does 'financial stability' seem likely except perhaps at the cost of the country's stability. Thus far, the major source of funding is Eskom's single 'shareholder' – the South African government. In February 2008, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel announced a R60 billion (\$6 billion) 'subordinated' loan to Eskom from the South African Treasury.

In 2009, the loan was supplemented by Treasury guarantees for a further R176 billion of Eskom debt. This would cover the World Bank loan as well as commercial loans. The only money that government is not standing surety for is a \$500 million (R5 billion) loan from the African Development Bank (AfDB) which was granted in November 2008.



The actual size of the World Bank loan is still to be finalised. The Bank is not commenting but something between \$2 and \$5 billion appears to be under discussion. \$5 billion is more than double the Bank's global lending for renewable energy. And even at \$2 billion, this would represent the largest single loan ever made by the Bank to any African country.

Despite voluntarily adopting the policies of the Washington consensus, the South African government has hitherto avoided major World Bank loans for fear of having those same policies imposed on it.

The new build programme is required to meet the demands of mining and industry, not household demand. But the cost of the new build, however, is to be shared between all customers. At least, that is the impression given to the public. But Eskom sells to energy intensive industries such as metal smelters under long term supply contracts at cut rates. Earthlife Africa suggests that these industries may be exempt from the price rises but, since the contracts are secret, there is no way of verifying this.

The urgent and contested question is: Who pays the costs, including the environmental costs, and who gets the benefits of Eskom's new build?

The World Bank in South Africa

In the 1950s the Bank lent Eskom money for a round of power plant building. After 1966, the Bank claims it did not lend money to South Africa until the political transition of the 1990s was under way.

But the Bank drove investment in the Lesotho Highlands Project in the 1980s. In formal terms, the loan was to Lesotho. In real terms, the project was negotiated behind the scenes with South Africa. Its primary purpose was to secure clean water for industrial expansion in the economic heartlands around Johannesburg. The water was needed not merely because there was not enough. It was also because mining and industry had fouled local water sources to the point where it was unusable even in industrial processes.

In 2000, the Bank initiated the Extractive Industries Review in response to mounting criticism from civil society organisations that its lending to oil, gas

Costs of New Build = Changing Figures

2004 = R87 Billion (Five Year)

2005 = R150 Billion (Five Year)

2007 = R244.5 Billion (no time frame)

2009 = R385 Billion (not all costs) (nearly half of all Treasury's Infrastructure Spending)

and mining projects contradicted its stated mission of alleviating poverty. The Review came back with the wrong answer. It found that poverty alleviation was neither the goal nor the outcome of the Bank's lending and recommended phasing out funding for oil and coal and focusing on sustainable energy. The Bank ignored the Review and increased funding for oil, gas, and coal projects.

To ensure that the money is found to cover the costs of the New Build, there is an ongoing struggle between Eskom, Nersa and society at large as Eskom tries to increase tariffs by as much as 90%. This year we are sitting at a 34% increase finally agreed.

Eskom is bound by the hip to coal for the next 40-60 years because they are investing in coal and are not seriously considering sustainable alternatives. Building more power stations takes us deeper into debt – this time debt to the World Bank – and on this occasion we will be FORCED to make 'structural adjustments to secure repayments'. The citizens will pay for the cost of this loan.

Way forward

Given the sheer scale of the this loan, we would like to present the research to as many forums as possible and to be able to articulate a message that we 'the people' are going to pay for this huge debt. We would also like to show the perverted relationship between the World Bank and South Africa as a Southern economy.

This research will feed into local campaigning against the energy choice by the South African government in the run up to Copenhagen as well as to expose the World Bank in Washington.



What's Happening with the NWMS?

By Musa Chamane

The National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) is being developed in order to implement the provisions of the NEM: Waste Act that was recently promulgated

Window dressing committee

The New National Environmental Management: Waste Act 2008 has been promulgated and municipalities are currently updating their Integrated Waste Management Plans to comply with the new Act. Meanwhile, the National Waste Management Strategy is being developed to implement the provisions of the Act. A government official chairs this process and the committee make-up seems discriminatory to some stakeholders. I am part of the Project Steering Committee for this development project but the committee is not free to decide who can join the committee and who cannot - a sad reflection on managed democracy.

First meeting of its kind

Government, in its actions and programmes, should not be discriminatory in any way. With this said, when waste pickers from around the country convened for the first time in Johannesburg for a national meeting, government was invited to address this meeting but to no avail. The intention when inviting government was to inform them of this community of people who work informally as recyclers and the role they play with respect to the objectives of waste management. We were hoping that government would recognise waste pickers in the development of waste implementation plans. One hundred waste pickers from seven provinces convened to discuss issues that threaten their livelihoods. The waste pickers were mainly from various landfill sites but there were also a few who collect from the streets. It is sad that government could not take the trouble to meet with these entrepreneurs when government has met with big business to hear their concerns.

Gravy train drives them to forget their job description

It makes me wonder what kind of civil servants we have in this country. We pay salaries to these people and at the end of the day they just become too big for their shoes and forget what it means to be a civil servant. Public participation has been a weakness of our government, but even when one offers an opportunity to government to come and listen to important ideas being shared by the people they are appointed to serve, they still disappoint us by rejecting our offer and disregard the fact that participation would feed into their processes. This action of purposefully ignoring community people is objectionable and downright disrespectful of our democracy!

Polokwane Declaration a winner

The National Waste Management Strategy is in draft format and a number of researches are being conducted to inform the strategy. There are positive elements that come with the new draft. The inclusion of the Polokwane declaration 2001 is quite encouraging. The recognition of the international obligations such as Stockholm and Basel Conventions are also good points. The Stockholm convention regulates the persistent organic pollutants (POPS) emissions. Our government seems confused because to comply with this convention there are technologies that cannot be imported, and it leads me to question why we (South Africa) are signatories of the convention and are at the same time promoting waste treatment through thermal technologies, which are likely to emit POPS.





Waste Pickers uniting at a meeting national meeting of people reclaiming waste on landfill sites and on the streets.

Photograph by groundWork

National Waste Management Stakeholder Training

It must be mentioned that while the intention of applying an indigent policy on Free Basic Refuse Removal (FBRR) is a good initiative on paper, it leaves much to be desired when it comes to implementation. A training session is planned to take place at the beginning of September 2009. The training will be focusing on strategy because it is important that the stakeholders understand the strategy and FBRR. In terms of selecting people to participate in this process, the process has been very controversial since the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs made the decision without consulting the stakeholders.

I, however, applaud our government for the gesture they have shown in trying to prepare for implementation

of the Waste Act 2009 within three months of promulgation. There are still some challenges that will be encountered by these processes if government continues excluding people such as waste pickers. Government officials need to understand that they are there on behalf of the government and their failures reflect badly on government. Disagreements with government have been the order of the day in South Africa and are often due to the incompetence of some officials. In terms of the National Waste Management Strategy I hope we are not off track. We can still address challenges such as failure to conduct proper public participation. The Act states clearly that such plans and strategies need to be in place within two years after promulgation of the Act, so at this point there is no need to rush the process. 



Environmental Racism in the 21st Century

By Musa Chamaane

The demise of the apartheid government does not seem to have diminished the fundamental environmental racism that has underpinned "developmental" planning decisions in Cato Ridge

Cato Ridge is a semi-rural area that lies between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The Cato Ridge leadership feels that they owe it to the next generation to save the environment. groundWork was asked by community leaders to come to their rescue following a presentation made to them by WSP consultants about the proposed Assmang Landfill Site. eThekwi Metro is currently looking for a new place to dump and bury its waste and the Cato Ridge area is where the domestic waste landfill is proposed.

Workers at Thor Chemicals in Cato Ridge bury a colleague who died from the effects of the mercury processed at the Thor plant. Photograph by groundWork



The main concern of the community is that the land proposed for the establishment of this landfill was reserved for RDP state housing for the community. The community feel betrayed by the eThekwi Metro as they are still waiting for their houses to be built on the land in question.

The other concern raised by the community is that there are four streams that descend from Assmang hill. The concern is water contamination by different waste materials. KwaXimba is a semi-rural area and the community is still very much dependent on these streams and a nearby river for agricultural purposes. There are also two schools that are located less than a kilometre from the proposed landfill site.

In the dark days of apartheid it was commonplace to erect landfills right next to black communities, and landfills such as Second Creek in East London pose a danger to local communities, including schools, due to pollution caused by the constant burning of waste, the foul odours and general nuisance. It is sad that this environmental racism appears to be persisting under the current government.

Apart from the KwaXimba community the business community in general are "gatvol"¹ of this proposal. This is the second time that this landfill development has been proposed. In the mid-90s the community of Ward 1 in the eThekwi Metro rejected the proposal of a landfill on this site. The community does not understand what has prompted the eThekwi Metro to come back with the same proposal. Cato Ridge has become a centre of development for the eThekwi Metro and has attracted a number of new businesses such as Safal Steel Manufacture, NCP Chlorchem and now the proposed mega rubbish dump.

¹ "Gatvol" is an Afrikaans expression that equates to the English "Fed up".



This is a real test for the present government's commitment to reverse the injustices of the past. One has to wait and see whether the freedom charter prevails. It is very disturbing seeing black communities protesting against a black government due to the lack of a will by government to honour the promises it has made to communities.

It would also be interesting to find out from the eThekwin Metro if they are familiar with the Polokwane Declaration of 2001 in which the government committed itself to minimise and recycle waste and reduce it by 50% by 2012. If government is being serious about commitments such as the above I see no reason why they have to promote the development of a landfill next to a predominately black community. I also see no reason for erecting a landfill with a life span of 80 years.

At the public meetings I have attended, communities have stood united against this proposed landfill. They vow that this landfill will never be established in Cato Ridge. The leadership has even threatened that they will take this campaign out of the boardroom and onto the streets if necessary. I feel that the eThekwin Metro owes the community some explanation since they have prior agreements with community regarding the land.

NGOs such as groundWork need to work hard with people on the ground to make sure that the promises are honoured and the mistakes of the past are never repeated. My experience working for NGOs is that some government officials have an anti-NGO mentality without realising that our involvement deepens our democracy. I am quite thrilled that the struggle continues. A true democracy will never be achieved without civil society organisations such as ours. ■



Workers at Assmang in Cato Ridge bury, in 2008, their colleagues who died as a result of an explosion at the factory. Photo by Terry Haywood, courtesy of The Mercury



Progress on the DUT Project

By Nomcebo Mvelase

Collaboration between groundWork and the Durban University of Technology (DUT) is proving to be valuable to all parties

Collaborative functioning between DUT and groundWork has started to bear fruit. It was quite an honour for groundWork to receive such a positive response from eThekini District Health and the rest of the key stakeholders, including the infection control nurses and nursing managers from the three hospitals, in confirming their participation for the 5th of August 2009.

It was on this day that the students gave a formal feedback of their findings from the medical waste audit that they conducted in three hospitals based in Durban. The enthusiasm, a high level of preparedness and excitement from all the students was amazing. They really took their time and effort to put their reports together. Even the manner in which they were dressed up - they were all so formal and smart looking! They were not just dressed for the campus but they were dressed for where they want to see themselves in the next few months, following the completion of their degree. The whole atmosphere was so exciting!

It was very important that all the concerned stakeholders took part in this process so that they could see a bigger picture of what exactly the problems concerning health care waste management are in their hospitals. It is not always the case that I meet such government officials; the District Manager from Ethekini was so professional and so open to positive criticism, she was transparent and very receptive. She acknowledges the fact that some of the negative findings are not only due to financial limitations but also due to the fact that some health care workers do not have a positive attitude. They do not want to comply with the prescribed policies

and guidelines for better management of health care waste. She stated that supervising people can be such a problem when they only want to be policed and do not take ownership of the health care waste program.

Following these discussions, we went on to draw strategies as to how groundWork can intervene in assisting the department to resolve the problems they are currently facing. We then concluded that groundWork would be part of the infection control meetings so that we can really get direction from them and then from there we can roll out specific campaigns for each institution.

This whole exercise has had mutual benefit for both the students and the department. The students got to physically expose themselves to the real world as far as environmental health is concerned, an experience that has been an eye opener for them and they learnt a lot but also, most importantly, the senior officials got to know about some of the problems which they have not been aware of. Excitingly, some of those problems are the problems that they promised to give prompt attention to.

It goes to prove that the power of working together is just so amazing!

I wish to express my appreciation to Joy Kistnisamy, Chairperson of the groundWork Board and a lecturer from DUT, who is the one who conceived this idea. As far as I can see it is going to go quite far.



Making the Health Care Sector Healthier

By Nomcebo Mvelase

groundWork and Health Care Without Harm hosted a workshop at an international meeting of nurses recently held in Durban

On the 29th of June 2009 groundWork, in partnership with Health Care Without Harm, hosted a workshop entitled "Making the Health Care Sector Healthier" at The Playhouse in Durban. This was one of the side events that took place prior to the International Council for Nurses Meeting that was held at the International Convention Centre in Durban between the 29th of June and the 4th of July 2009.

At the groundWork workshop nurses from all around the world gathered and discussed the role they can play in dealing with the environmental concerns that we face. The environment that we live in is not the same as it was 15 years ago. We are now exposed to more pollutants, chemicals and radiation that are impacting on our everyday health and the ecological systems than ever before. Alarmingly, health care institutions are also currently the source of some of these pollutants.

It was a shock for most of the nurses to learn that even during performing simple procedures like taking temperatures with a glass mercury thermometer, all the people in the health care setting could be at risk. Most nurses were not aware of the dangers associated with mercury. Even some of those who were aware of how dangerous mercury is were not aware that there are other thermometers available that are as accurate and affordable as the mercury thermometers and much safer. It is a serious concern that when a patient is treated they are exposed to procedures that commonly rely on medical products made with harmful chemicals, not only mercury but also poly vinyl chloride (PVC) which is used in things like bed liners, blood bags, catheters and even gloves. PVC has been found to leach from these products and expose patients and health care workers to

risk. On top of that, health care waste from health care institutions is also potentially dangerous and is growing at alarming volumes rather than decreasing. Changes in technology and the increased use of plastics such as PVC in disposable products have substantially increased the potential harm as well as the amount of waste to be disposed of.

Even when all these challenges are apparent, nurses still did not realise how big a role they could play in correcting the situation. After this meeting nurses are motivated to really work beyond nursing procedures like administering medication or giving injections: they understand that they need to act as agents for a healthier environment. They now understand that it is not sustainable to treat a patient in an unhealthy environment and it is nobody else's role but that of health care workers, including nurses, to ensure a healthy environment in health care institutions. One of the delegates actually made this statement: "As nurses, we can't afford to let hospitals be a breeding ground for infections, we must contribute to making them a place for the healing and recovery of our patients." This is so true and we can't delay anymore so, all those concerned about environmental health, the time to translate knowledge into action is NOW!

On behalf of groundWork I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all the nurses who were part of this inspiring process and most importantly I wish to thank our co-organisers, Health Care Without Harm, particularly Anna Gillmore Hall and Karen Ballard, the two nurses who were involved in all the arrangements from the very early planning phase up until the end.



A First Trip to Belgium

By Nomcebo Mvelase

groundWork was present at an international Mercury meeting in Brussels

I did not know much about Belgium beyond the fact that it is famous for its chocolates and its history around World War II, so it was an exciting opportunity to fly to Brussels on the 17th of June to meet with different people and share ideas at the Global Movement for Mercury Free Health Care meeting. Delegates from Bulgaria, United Kingdom, Spain, Netherlands, USA, Italy, China, Greece, France and Germany attended this meeting.

The aim of this EU strategy is to decrease mercury levels in the environment and human exposure to mercury. Sphygmomanometers (blood pressure measuring devices) contain 80–100 grams of mercury. This poses a threat to health if the instrument is damaged and the mercury escapes and is also costly to clean up. The big goal, which we must achieve by 2017, is to phase out the demand for mercury-containing fever thermometers by at least 70% and to shift the production of all mercury-containing fever thermometers and sphygmomanometers to accurate, affordable and safer non-mercury alternatives. Developing countries Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, India, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Phillipines, Senegal, South Africa, Taiwan, Uruguay, and Vietnam are already substituting or piloting substitution of mercury based medical devices.

One of the questions raised was whether we can do without mercury sphygmomanometers and whether or not a mercury column is still needed for calibration of mercury free equipment in hospitals and clinics. Calibration is carried out periodically against a reference manometer to ensure that a specific sphygmomanometer functions properly and measures accurately. A very active debate took place as the European Coordination Committee of the Radiological, Electrometrical and Health Care Industry (COCIR) is of the opinion that Hg Sphygmomanometers must not be banned from either practical use or for calibration purposes

because they provide the most accurate readings possible. However, we were made to understand the fact that no matter what type of blood pressure measurement device is used both aneroid and mercury sphygmomanometers must be calibrated regularly to avoid errors like misdiagnosis and mistreatment of patients. According to Thomas Grant, Director of Regional Category Management for Welch Allyn (a company that produces Mercury free devices), there is no need to use mercury for validation. It is now very clear to me that every technology has the potential to introduce error, especially if not properly maintained and where labour is expensive or access to well trained personnel is limited an automated device may provide the highest value mercury-free solution.

Even in the dentistry field there is evidence that dental assistants are seriously affected by the use of mercury while preparing dental amalgam, many reporting having children born with neurological problems. It was estimated that approximately 500 million citizens in the EU each contain 3 to 4 grams of mercury. Studies presented from Norway showed dental assistants to have neurological and psychosomatic symptoms, problems with concentration, fatigue and sleep disturbance. There was general support of the idea that mercury use in dental amalgams can indeed be decreased or phased out in the coming years, since adequate alternatives are already available and research could provide for a wider range of even better performing materials.

Other sources of mercury in health care include gastrointestinal tubes, laboratory chemicals, pharmaceutical products, electrical applications, medical waste incineration and open burning. This goes to prove how huge the problem is. We need to have sound solutions to these problems; like spillage management procedures and awareness campaigns but what is most important is the fact that recycling of instruments or donating them to the 3rd World is not an option!



Steely Resolve

By Sunita Dubey

Joining forces to tame the steel giant ArcelorMittal

During the past six months the international coalition Global Action on ArcelorMittal (GAAM) has been focussed on putting pressure on ArcelorMittal at international levels to move them towards better business practices and ethics through collecting information on their local operations through fact finding missions.

Even though on a global level ArcelorMittal increased its CSR activities in 2008, including issuing its first corporate responsibility report, real improvements in environmental health and safety practices have yet to filter through to the various ArcelorMittal companies in different countries. Investments in pollution prevention and health and safety need to be made, including those that are most needed for environmental improvement and not only for increasing production. The company needs to ensure that its subsidiaries make real, tangible improvements for communities on the ground.

Along with the international recession and decrease in demand for steel, the growing discontent among workers and communities alike is taking a toll on the company, but still taming the beast is taking its own time. Every time the talk of improving the conditions of the local environment and communities has been raised by the coalition, ArcelorMittal has thrown back the same old argument of the financial crisis. ArcelorMittal has announced nearly 1,000 layoffs in the United States and another 1,000 European steel workers clashed with riot police outside its May 12 shareholders' meeting in Luxembourg in a protest over output cuts. This makes it all the more frustrating that ArcelorMittal did not make the necessary investments while it was making large profits. Even during the crisis, in South Africa ArcelorMittal has been proud to announce having excess free cash of R5 Billion rand (around EUR 500 million). Part of this excess should

be used to retrofit the Vanderbijlpark plant to bring it closer to acceptable world standards.

The company agreed in a May 2009 meeting with the coalition to work together for better working conditions for workers, a safer environment for communities and a reduction of their ecological footprint. Old habits, however, die hard as they have not committed to any meaningful changes. The coalition had laid down various demands concerning disclosure of information about steel mills in Kazakhstan, Czech



Forced relocations and broken homes are the result of ArcelorMittal's broken promises of a new life in a new South Africa. Photograph courtesy Patricia Driscoll

Republic, Liberia, India and South Africa, but the reply from ArcelorMittal was based on the denial of problems and implausible excuses to not disclose the information.

The fact remains that out of the facilities that GAAM is regularly monitoring none has yet an approved or functioning Stakeholder Engagement Plan. The one developed in Kazakhstan last year has not been approved or implemented and requests for information are still regularly ignored. In Ukraine a plan is currently under development. So far very little information on the company's pollution is available in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The



company has claimed that 91% of their production sites are ISO14001 certified. Still, it is a fact that the air quality around several of ArcelorMittal's facilities, including those in Ostrava (CZ), Zenica (B-H), Vanderbijlpark (South Africa) is very poor and does not meet national or EU legal standards, and that in some countries, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and South Africa, information about ArcelorMittal's air pollution emissions is not available to the public.

The coalition had also called on ArcelorMittal to publicly respond to concerns about the 100 pick-up trucks ostensibly donated for agricultural use in Liberia, but which have ended up being used by members of the Liberian Legislature. Whether or not the company was aware of the risk of the misuse of this donation at the time it was made, it is now aware of it and must take action to ensure that the vehicles are put to proper use or retrieved. In a letter dated the 3rd of August 2009 Mr. Rolland Verstappen of ArcelorMittal responded to the coalition that the donation of the trucks was in response to a request,

which was also sent to other extractive companies, from the Government of Liberia, for vehicles that would enable its legislative members to have access to rural communities in their constituencies. The letter implied that the company should not be held responsible for their donation's improper use, as these trucks are now the property of Liberian government.

All this while the coalition has been keeping an eye on various ArcelorMittal activities and cross-checking and validating the tall claims of the company. The strategy of open dialogue at the international level without compromising the local struggles is paying off. Despite the above mentioned road blocks, the company has been engaging with the local communities and groups, especially in South Africa and Liberia. Even though the pace of dialogue and actions by ArcelorMittal is slow, the direction is right. The challenge for the international coalition is to keep up the pressure on the company while bringing a positive tone to the negotiating tables. ■

Workers bury their colleagues who were killed in an accident at the ArcelorMittal Lening Mine in Kazakhstan in 2006.
Photograph courtesy of BankWatch



In Brief

Mauritian civil society says NO to Gamma Covanta "Waste to Energy" Municipal Waste Incinerator

In 2007 the Mauritian Ministry of Environment granted an EIA license to a partnership between Gamma and the multinational waste incineration company Covanta to build a 300 000 tonnes waste to energy municipal waste incinerator at La Chaumière (Republic of Mauritius). This was appealed in December 2007 by a group of local residents. Since GAIA have given support and coordinated the expert testimony of technical experts, these local appellants have got the support of a broad base of community groups and are no longer alone in the battle against the Project.

Waste in Mauritius is composed of approximately 70% green and kitchen waste, and the GAIA exports have aimed to illustrate the benefits of composting for the island economy as well as the technical and associated public health risks of incineration.

As grassroots momentum has gathered speed, there is now emerging a sense of a real national movement against waste incineration Mauritius. Known locally as the *Collectif des Opposants à l'Incineration de Déchets*, and boasting groups as diverse as NGOs, grassroots community organisations, local residents associations and individual citizens, they have begun mobilising and have undertaken a range of local initiatives including public marches and protests, public education on the dangers of incineration and the benefits of zero waste activities, press work, and illustrating the dangers to tourism.

Environmental Health Research Network for Southern Africa

On Monday 17 August 2009 the CSIR brought together environmental health (EH) stakeholders from Durban, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and Stellenbosch via video link with the purpose of bringing together all interested parties and stakeholders to compile a network of institutions and organisations fulfilling environmental health research in Southern Africa. Other objectives included documenting all issues, and noting concerns and perceived priorities for the environmental health research community in Southern Africa.

After an introduction and background to the environmental health research network, delegates were asked what environmental health research functions they undertook with the intention of understanding what environmental health research gaps currently exist in South Africa. Once we understand the gaps we can then decide what EH research areas to prioritise. This network can also possibly act as a clearinghouse for EH research (usually undertaken by local authorities) and not routinely published in peer review journals, as well as affording stakeholders the opportunity to meet with potential collaborators. All environmental health stakeholders/researchers who wish to participate in this initiative must please contact Dr. Caradee Wright, Research Group Leader, Environmental Health, CSIR; email: cwright@csir.co.za; Work: +27 12 841 3092; Mobile: +27 82 677 4037 http://www.csir.co.za/nre/pollution_and_waste/eh.html

Shell: Further imprisonments of locals in County Mayo, Ireland

Four months after twenty-six former Goldman Environmental Prize recipients wrote to the Prime Ministers of Ireland and Norway, there has been no response to the concerns raised in the letter. The letter asked for urgent intervention in what is becoming a humanitarian crisis. Despite this international plea, the situation has deteriorated with further local activists being imprisoned. Long time residents of the area, Maura Harrington and Niall Harnett, have been convicted for taking action as part of a campaign of peaceful civil disobedience against the ill-fated Corrib Gas Project.

The intimidation by the state in collusion with Shell has resulted in local fisherman boats being impounded by the local police at the height of the fishing season. There are concerns that Shell's laying of pipelines is leading to local people being unable to fish where they have been fishing for decades, for their livelihoods. Although Shell has denied that it was involved in the sinking of a local boat, Shell has paid compensation to some fisherman for the loss of their access to fishing during Shell's laying of the gas pipeline. Sadly, this long struggle which is almost a decade old seems far from over. Please visit www.sheltosea.com and support the local struggle of the Global South in the North!



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While I fly around, sadly placing my own life and those of all of us in jeopardy as I add greenhouse gasses to our climate change dilemma, I am bombarded by various in-flight magazines about how rosy the world is, and how great big capital is. I must say there are a few exceptions to this, and the *Skyways* magazine is one. But as regards the formerly mentioned bombardment of information, sometimes the irony of the situation comes through ever so strikingly.

Many of us have seen the cyclone images of Katrina and other such large events where swirls of clouds on a TV screen give us a vision of danger and mayhem. These events are attributed to the ongoing global climate change.

In the recent *Sawubona*, South African Airways' in-flight magazine, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality took out an advert depicting a cyclone over their area, punting how the 'investment temperature' will be rising, and how things have 'started to heat up in the last five years'.

How correct they are. Sadly, as they go for all the major climate change nasty companies, from the aluminium smelters to major crude oil refineries, the temperature will be rising... and the water as well, so Coega might be in for a surprise.

