



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Radioactive sand being used in housing, says Bench Marks study

Johannesburg, Tuesday 29 August 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The unregulated use of radioactive sand drawn from mine tailings/slimes waste for low-cost housing in Soweto is putting thousands of its residents at risk of developing cancer, a new study by the Bench Marks Foundation has found.

The study, “Waiting to inhale” was released in Johannesburg today and provides groundbreaking data into the household health of four communities in Johannesburg – Riverlea, Diepkloof, Meadowlands and Doornkop – all of which are in close proximity to waste from mining activity.

The research has found that building contractors and residents frequently load toxic and radioactive tailings sand from mining tailings/slimes waste areas, which is then retailed and used in the cement mix to construct or extend housing in Soweto.

The radioactivity comes from the presence of radon in the mine waste, a by product of decomposing uranium found both naturally in the environment and as a result of decomposing mine waste. Radon gas is the second largest cause of lung cancer on the planet after smoking.

Bench Marks says that South Africa lacks adequate radon regulations for the building industry and residential property development, and has called on the National Nuclear Regulator (NNR) and the Department of Health (DOH) to undertake an epidemiological study on the impacts of mining on the health of communities living in at-risk areas, focusing particularly on the impacts of dust from mining waste on respiratory illnesses, and the occurrence and impact of radon in the building material of their houses.

The NNR should also enforce the establishment of exclusion zones, fencing, securing and signposting of all radioactive tailings waste facilities in Gauteng and nationally and effectively legislate and regulate this issue.

The Department of Human Settlements and the Johannesburg Council should also legislate for and regulate the exclusion of land with elevated levels of radon from being used for housing development.

“The NNR should immediately draft concept legislation for tabling in Parliament and into legislation. Such legislation should not include any exclusionary clauses,” Bench Marks said.

ENDS

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation mandated by churches to monitor the practices of multi-national corporations to

- ensure they respect human rights;
- protect the environment;
- ensure that profit-making is not done at the expense of other interest groups; and
- ensure that those most negatively impacted upon are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporations.

The Foundation was launched in 2001 by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC.

Bench Marks Foundation contact:	Bench Marks Foundation media contact
David van Wyk, Lead Researcher, +27 (0) 82 652 5061 Chris Molebatsi, Research Officer, +27 (0) 73 792 8272 Hassen Lorgat, Advocacy and Lobbying Officer, + (0) 82 362 6180 Bench Marks Foundation, +27 (0) 11 832 1743/2 Email: info@bench-marks.org.za	Ruth Coggin +27 (0) 82 903 5819 Email: ruth@quo-vadis.co.za