

# Harmful or not?

Conflicting information on impact of stench provided by mayco members...

JOHN HARVEY

Last year, the City of Cape Town conceded that emissions from the Oceana fishmeal factory could be harmful to the health of residents living in the factory's immediate surroundings ("Stench halts housing", Sentinel, August 26 2016).

At the time, then mayoral committee member for health Siyabulela Mamkeli explained that a housing project to develop Community Residential Units (CRU) on Erf 8474 – known to locals as Dallas – had been placed on hold after an air quality study was commissioned and a specialist consultant recommended the proposed sites not be developed for residential purposes.

He admitted that emissions



■ The Oceana fishmeal factory at the centre of the controversy around alleged hazardous emissions.

from industrial processes could potentially be harmful to human health and for that reason, he said it was necessary to manage and assess the impacts of industrial activities on new residential developments where in worst-case

scenarios, potential air pollution risks may occur.

But in written answers to the Sentinel on Friday March 24, Brett Herron, mayoral committee member for transport and urban development, said the health risk

assessment commissioned by the City had "ruled out" adverse health effects associated with emissions from the factory.

"Health risks based on modelled concentrations of hydrogen sulphide, trimethylamine, PM2.5

and sulphur dioxide would not be at a level where exposure may lead to adverse health effects," he said.

"All of the sites evaluated were determined to be safe for residential development in so far as health risks associated with inhalation of ambient air at the sites are concerned." Mr Herron added that odours would "occasionally be at a level that are detectable by residents".

The Sentinel had asked Mr Mamkeli for a copy of the risk assessment report, but he refused, saying it was highly technical and not suitable for general public consumption ("Dallas housing drama", Sentinel, September 2 2016).

Civic organisations have pointed out that there appears to be a contradiction between the statements of Mr Mamkeli, who now serves as Mayco member for area central, and those of Mr Herron, and are calling for the risk assessment report to be released immediately.

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# Conflicting information 'concerning'

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But JP Smith, Mayco member for safety and security and social services, said Mr Mamkeli was "not incorrect in his statement".

"Industrial emissions have the potential to be hazardous to human health. The hazard is diminished over space and time i.e. with distance from source. Simply put, if one puts one's mouth close to a car exhaust and breathes in the air for long enough, one will surely die from carbon monoxide poisoning. But with distance, the pollutants have time to dilute and disperse to the effect that we can freely use cars without fear. It is similar with emissions from factory boiler stacks, where for health protection reasons residential premises should not be permitted too close to factories," he said.

Kiara Worth, founder of Fresh Air for Hout Bay (FAHB), the organisation which has repeatedly voiced concern about the odour's effect on business and possible health implications for the town, said the health risk assessment was a matter of public concern.

"People have a right to know if their health is being compromised by Oceana's emissions. We have requested the document be made public but so far this has not been done," Ms Worth said.

"The conflicting information we have received from the City is concerning.

"Last year Councillor Mamkeli stated that housing was delayed because of the negative health impacts cited in the report. Now we are told there are no health concerns, but the document is still not being released. What is the truth and who do we trust? Does the cocktail of gases emitted by Oceana compromise our health? We have a right to know and the City has a responsibility to be transparent with this information."

She said over the years FAHB had received hundreds of complaints from residents detailing how their health had been impacted, "from scratchy eyes

and runny noses to severe nausea, asthma and migraines".

"Negative impacts are clearly being experienced and these need to be documented."

Roscoe Jacobs, secretary of the Hout Bay Civic Association, said the City needed to be transparent on the land issue. "We can't have a situation where we are being told different stories by different political heads," he said.

"We have actually requested through the Promotion of Access to Information Act to have the (risk assessment) report made public, so we can see exactly what is contained in it. This process has been delayed for so long already."

Mr Jacobs added it was important that once the housing project continued, a proper project steering committee was established.

"The City also has to look at other sites outside of Hangberg where residents affected by the housing development can be temporarily relocated."

In February this year, following a number of complaints from residents about the smell emanating from Oceana, Mayco member of area north, Suzette Little, told the Sentinel they had commissioned an ambient air quality analyser that analyses hydrogen sulphide in the fish meal factory.

The levels of hydrogen sulphide recorded at this analyser at the start of the 2017 fishing season showed emissions were way below levels known to cause health risks, according to Ms Little.

Mr Smith explained that the ambient air quality measuring station only measured hydrogen sulphide emissions, where the health risk assessment identified all possible pollutants emitted by the factory.

"This process offers a more complete assessment of air quality and involves the formulation of an emission inventory for all emissions in the Hout Bay Harbour precinct," he said.

"This information, along with historical climatological data, was used as input data into an

atmospheric dispersion model to predict what the ground level concentrations of the various pollutants would be under various scenarios. Pollution concentration isopleths (contours) were then produced and superimposed on a GIS map of the area showing the proposed sites for development."

Meanwhile, Warren Abrahams, of the Peace and Mediation Forum, indicated that discussions with the City where ongoing with respect to a new site for the housing development.

One of the areas being looked at is the site below Hout Bay High School, according to Mr Abrahams.

However, Mr Herron said the City could not identify the proposed sites for affordable housing at this stage. "In the past, the identification of potential sites for affordable housing development has occasionally resulted in the illegal occupation of these sites due to the dire need for housing and land," he said.

"Once such a situation develops, projects can be delayed by months or even years - this is a situation that the City needs to prevent as far as possible. As such, the proposed sites for housing in Hout Bay will remain confidential until planning has progressed further and the City is confident that the sites are feasible for development."

Ms Worth said FAHB was currently conducting an odour pollution impact survey that investigated how health, well-being and businesses were affected by Oceana's emissions.

"We encourage everyone to complete this survey to help us build an understanding and all information can be found on our website [www.smellsfishy.co.za](http://www.smellsfishy.co.za)

"In addition, FAHB will be hosting an information stand at Mainstream Centre tomorrow Saturday April 1 from 10am to 2pm.

"Residents will be able to complete the survey, collect information and learn more about what can be done to resolve this situation."

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