

NPA to charge EnviroServ over 'toxic fumes' at Shongweni landfill site

By Nce Mkhize

6 Mar 2017

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) has said that it has decided to press charges against the waste disposal company EnviroServ for "emitting toxic fumes from its Shongweni landfill site".



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The decision to charge was announced by KwaZulu-Natal NPA head, Advocate Moipone Noko.

Dean Thompson, CEO of EnviroServ has described charges brought against it as premature, and that the company is ready to defend any legal action.

The charges against EnviroServ come after a series of events, including protests by residents complaining of an unbearable stench. In September, the Green Scorpions opened a case against the company for contravening the National Air Quality Act.

Two weeks ago the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) issued a notice of intention to revoke or suspend EnviroServ's landfill licence, pending further investigations. Lauren Johnson, an environmental activist and head of the non-profit Upper Highway Air, expressed relief that EnviroServ was finally being taken to task.

However, Thompson has accused the Green Scorpions of playing to the gallery, saying the company had entered into an arrangement with the DEA. Thompson said on Thursday, 2 March, that the company had learnt of the NPA's decision to prosecute through the media and had not received any formal charges.

"In view of certain agreements concluded with the DEA, as recently as February 15 2017, the NPA's decision is premature and will be opposed. We have been in consultation with the authorities for four months now, and had an agreed process which ends in April," he said. "The charges, therefore, come as a surprise to us as we are still awaiting reports by the independent experts which will contain conclusive facts."

Thompson said the company has sought to work with the affected communities but there were individuals stoking residents' anger and spreading false information about the company: "We first became aware of odour complaints from the community surrounding our Shongweni site in April 2016. This was the first time we had recorded a concentration of complaints since we first started operating there."

"We started talking to the community immediately and a town hall meeting was held where a working group (including members of the community) was set up and tasked with conducting a joint fact-finding mission," Thompson said. "We also set up a complaints line where people could report odour events via a website or SMS."

Source: Business Day

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