

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY QUESTION 2756.

Mrs H Lamoela (DA) to ask the Minister of Energy:

- (1) Whether the National Nuclear Regulator (NNR) has (a) cleaned up radioactive contamination emanating from the 120 years of poor disposal of mining wastes,(b) taken regulatory decisions regarding (i) inappropriate residential developments on or adjacent to uraniumiferous tailings dumps,(ii) the use of uraniumiferous tailings for construction material for residential dwellings, (iii) the (aa) uranium contamination as a result of the flooding of the mining basins with acid mine water and (bb) radon risks to informal settlements where the radioactive gas can easily accumulate in low lying shacks (details furnished) and (c) conducted epidemiological studies to quantify the health impacts of radioactive waste on communities in the Witwatersrand Goldfields; if not, why not; if so, what action did the NNR take in each case;
- (2) whether members of the board have been restricted in any way to deal with concerns of affected communities and the findings of reports in board meetings; if so, how were board members restricted,(a) what are the reasons for restricting board members and (c) how may members of the board raise concerns of affected communities and findings of reports in board meetings
- (3) whether all board members are technically qualified to understand and make informed decisions on matters pertaining to nuclear waste, uraniumiferous mining waste and associated health risks and hazards; if not, (a) why not, which board members are not qualified and (c) how does the board intend to deal with these issues; if so, what are the relevant details? NW3218E

Reply

- (a) In ensuring the correct application of the “polluter pays” principle, the NNR cannot be held responsible for the cleanup of radioactive contamination due to poor disposal from mining activities. This is a matter for the operators who were responsible for generating mining waste and if these are not traceable, the Department of Mineral Resources bears the responsibility in this regard.
- (b) (i) The NNR has taken regulatory decisions on residential developments that pose an immediate risk to members of the public. The NNR exercised its mandate in protecting residents of the Tudor shaft informal settlement. Further matters require that high-confidence radiological assessments be used as a basis for such decisions. The NNR is involved in activities that would further characterize the areas that have reflected some levels of radiation that could cause concern in the long run.

(ii) The NNR prohibits the use of uraniferous tailings for the construction of residential dwellings.

(iii) In respect of this matter, NNR is obligated to observe the mandate of the Department of Water Affairs but would however need to engage in cooperative governance regarding acid mine drainage.

(bb) The NNR would need to ensure that high-confidence assessments are undertaken in order to quantify whether the levels of radon pose a risk to members of the public. These matters need to be coordinated with the relevant municipalities.

© It is not within the scope of the NNR mandate to conduct epidemiological studies for affected communities. The Department of Health is the appropriate authority in this regard.

2. The Board has never been restricted in any way from dealing with the concerns of affected communities and the findings of reports in board meetings.

(a) Not applicable. Refer to answer above.

(b) Not applicable. Refer to answer above.

3. (a) Board members are generally qualified to handle matters pertaining to the NNR mandate and to make informed decisions relating to nuclear waste, uraniferous mining waste and associated health risks and hazards. Where Board members do not possess sufficient technical knowledge, the Board sources technical experts to provide technical input in order to inform the Board in decision-making.

(a) Refer to answer above.

© All Board members possess necessary expertise to deal with matters of governance relating to the NNR mandate.