

ADDRESS TO TRANSVAAL COAL OWNERS ASSOCIATION

COMBATTING OF AIR POLLUTION IN SOWETO

by

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Some months ago there was a reference in a report in 'The Star' to "Soweto's perpetually murky skies". Anybody who has been in or near Soweto in the morning or evening on any day of the year, but particularly during the winter months, will appreciate the seriousness of the smog and air pollution problem in the area. No wonder therefore, that Soweto is said to be not only the worst smog area in Johannesburg, but according to a recent report in the local Press, among the worst in the world.

I need hardly mention that heavy smog and polluted air constitute a serious health hazard, not only to the residents of Soweto itself but in fact to the surrounding areas. The City itself where the residents of Soweto work, is similarly vulnerable to the affects of the pollution problem of Soweto. Urgent and drastic action is therefore called for to reduce and eventually solve this problem.

My Council has been very conscious of this problem for many years, particularly as the majority of houses in Soweto do not have electricity at this stage and are obliged to use conventional coal stoves, which account for the heavy air pollution. As far back as the 1950's, my Council approved a "Ten-Year Plan" to electrify Soweto, but financial stringency over the years has severely restricted progress in this regard.

I realise of course that individual coal merchants may well see the steps planned by my Council to combat air pollution in Soweto by expediting electrification, as a threat to their businesses, but I have no doubt that an organisation such as the Transvaal Coal Owners Association, appreciates the problem and will lend their selfless and wholehearted support to any action that is taken to make the air of Soweto clean and healthy for the benefit of the 700 000 residents.

Although urgent action is warranted and essential, it will be appreciated that any steps taken to eliminate the smoke hazard must of necessity be gradual. There are in excess 60 000 conventional coal stoves currently used in Soweto, and as I stressed in my Press statement on 2 March 1973, there can be no talk, for practical reasons, of compelling existing tenants to dispose of their conventional coal stoves and acquire smokeless ones at this stage. An intensive publicity campaign, fully supported by the Urban Bantu Council, has however been launched by the Non-European Affairs Department with a view to bringing home to the people of Soweto the dangers of air pollution and to encourage them to consider buying smokeless type stoves or electric stoves in areas where electricity is available. A publicity campaign in itself does obviously not go far enough and positive action is necessary. To this end my Council has decided that as from 1 March 1973, new tenants who are allocated houses in Soweto, will not be allowed to use conventional coal stoves, but will be paid a subsidy of R25 if they purchase and instal a satisfactory smokeless stove. In areas where electricity is available, new tenants will be required to use electric stoves, and in this case too, a subsidy of R25 will be paid.

Despite the anti-pollution steps at this stage, it is clear that there will be a substantial demand for coal for conventional stoves for some years to come, but hopefully on a diminishing basis. Likewise there will be a demand for coal for smokeless stoves for many years.

I might mention that there are now seven manufacturers making smokeless

stoves which are available at prices ranging from R75 to over R200. These stoves are on display at demonstration centres at certain administration offices in Soweto. It is of course important to stress to tenants changing to smokeless stoves, that these stoves are more economical than the conventional type of stove.

Manufacturers of coal stoves have indicated that the manufacture of conventional type coal stoves is likely to be discontinued within the next eighteen months. Existing tenants in Soweto who wish to replace their present coal stoves in the future, will therefore have to acquire a smokeless stove or, of course, an electric stove if electricity is available. I am very grateful for this development.

The positive and active support of your association in my Council's campaign to purify the air of Soweto and promote the health of its residents is evidenced by the fact that you are providing coal at the demonstration centres free of charge. For this support and co-operation I wish to thank you publicly and I am confident that my Council can look forward to your continued support in this most worthwhile and essential venture.