

Engen gets storm-damaged schools ship-shape for 2019

Engen has come to the rescue of five Durban schools severely damaged in storms by committing R1 million to effect repairs critical to the safety, comfort and security of pupils and teachers.

“Engen turned our darkness into light,” says Colin Chand, principal of Collingwood Primary in Wentworth, which was severely affected by the October 2017 storms, forcing the children and teachers into mobile units on the school fields.

Without any electricity, the school community struggled throughout the 2018 academic year in dark and extremely hot conditions – until news of the Engen donation came.

“We expected a long process to rebuild the school, because we know the government tender process is a long one. But now our 1 200 pupils are learning in the light again, and we can use our fans, so we are extremely relieved,” adds Chand of the work Engen financed to electrify the mobile units.

Adhila Hamdulay, Engen’s Corporate Social Investment Manager, says Engen committed the funds to assist five schools in Merebank and Wentworth, which are neighbours of the Engen Refinery in South Durban.

All the schools identified for assistance were severely damaged when a massive storm wreaked havoc in Durban on 10 October last year. A total 42 schools in KwaZulu-Natal were affected by the deluge, which left 11 people dead and racked up a repair bill of more than R16 million in respect of public buildings.

“Engen takes our responsibility to the community surrounding our Refinery very seriously. We also remain cognisant of the need to partner with government to assist where we can, so it seemed obvious that we should step up and help,” says Hamdulay.

All five affected schools had waited for months for assistance when Engen funded the start of the repair work in April this year. Other than Collingwood Primary, Settlers Primary School, Rustomjee Primary School, Wentworth Primary School and Fairvale Secondary School were also assisted.

Among the repairs effected were the installation of new windows, ceilings and gutters, structural repair work, roof repairs, removal of damaged trees, and the erection of new perimeter fencing.

Dale Seidle, principal of Fairvale Secondary in Wentworth, says they were especially grateful to Engen for repairing their perimeter fencing, the damage to which had posed a safety risk for pupils and a security risk for their facilities.

“We are a technical school and we have a lot of expensive equipment and machinery on the premises, so it was an enormous relief to have the fence repaired and in place again,” he says, adding that the many trees felled by the storm had also finally been removed from their grounds.

“We are extremely appreciative of Engen’s help, in the interests of offering the best possible education to our pupils in optimal conditions,” adds Seidle.

Hamdulay says it was heart-warming to learn what a big difference the Engen donation made to so many lives.

“We always like to start by paying special attention to the people in the communities in which we operate, and to be able to help ensure these neighbouring schools are ship-shape for the start of the 2019 academic year is extremely heartening.”