

New regulations clamping down on toxic waste (544 words)

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New regulations governing the disposal of hazardous waste are kicking in, obliging manufacturers to comply with much stricter standards than in the past.

The authorities at hazardous waste landfill sites are enforcing the new rules and, in recent months, have rejected many samples of the same waste materials that were previously accepted.

The manufacturers in question are now required to treat their waste to reduce its concentrations of hazardous materials, before submitting another sample.

The timber treatment sector is one of many that is encountering the new rules, said Bertus Coetzee, the MD of wood preservative manufacturer Dolphin Bay Chemicals, which supplies wood preservatives and services to a large proportion of the sector in South Africa and other African countries.

Dolphin Bay is one of the few companies in the country registered to ensure the proper disposal of hazardous waste, and performs the service for many of its clients. The company also provides a waste-analysis service, which determines whether the waste should be treated before the disposal process starts.

Inspectors have been stepping up their visits to treatment plants over the past year to ensure that companies have the waste disposal certificates they require, along with other requirements including atmospheric emissions licences, environmental authorisations and the necessary infrastructure to prevent contamination on site, Coetzee observed.

"We have all become aware how compliance saves considerable time and money in the long run, as emergency measures tend to be more expensive and, of course, are much more stressful," said Coetzee. "The timber treatment industry is taking great effort to ensure its environmental sustainability.

The new rules are part of the government's "reduce, reuse, recycle" approach to all waste. Hazardous waste is now being given a rating of zero, one, two or three, depending on its concentration of hazardous materials. A zero rating indicates the highest levels and would result in the landfill site turning away waste until it has been treated to improve its rating.

The rating depends on the "total concentrations" and "leachable concentrations" of hazardous materials the waste contains.

The new rules are contained in the Waste Classification and Management Regulations, which apply to the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) Waste Act: 2008. Published in 2013, they came into effect late last year.

Under the old regulations, samples had to be submitted for each waste consignment. The certification manufacturers now receive is now valid for five years, regardless of how many consignments are submitted, as long as the waste stream remains the same. However, the classification is now much more expensive.

While the previous regulations focused on the disposal of waste at landfill sites and the protection of water resources, the new rules aim to reduce the reduction of waste at source, and promote the government's "reduce, re-use, recycle" approach to waste.

Like the existing regulations, the new ones require waste generators to classify their waste under SANS10234 within 180 days of it being generated. The waste must be used, recycled, recovered or disposed of within 18 months of generation.

"In future, the tolerances for concentrations of hazardous waste are likely to become even lower, as the government is seeking to reduce and even eliminate the production of hazardous waste," said Coetzee. "We are all being forced to operate in an environmentally friendly way."

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