

## **Drinking water 'contaminated'**

22/10/2007 14:00 - (SA)

Sydney Masinga

Louis Trichardt - Residents of Louis Trichardt are drinking their own faeces.

Water samples tested at the University of Venda (Univen) have found alarming levels of the dangerous e-coli bacteria, which is found in human waste, in all local water sources, including municipal water that comes out of the taps in peoples' homes.

The findings come amidst a local and as yet still unexplained outbreak of Hepatitis A, an acute infectious disease of the liver that is caused by poor good hygiene and sanitation.

"It's worse than we initially thought," said Soutpansberg Taxpayer's Association (STPA) deputy chairperson, Carel Breytenbach, this week.

### **R23m grant 'missing'**

The STPA sent water samples from a variety of local sources to Univen for testing after local residents complained and after farmers raised concern that the polluted water was being used to irrigate food crops.

"The tests results confirm that there is a real danger here. We have written to the Makhado local municipality informing them that the current water quality is dangerous to humans and other forms of life, and appealing for government to urgently deal with this life threatening situation, especially since water that is used for human consumption is contaminated," he said.

Breytenbach explains that there should be zero e-coli bacteria per 100ml of water, but that the tests showed 500 individual e-coli bacteria per 100ml in clean water pumped to the town, 400 individual bacteria per 100 ml in borehole water, 100 per 100ml in the Albasini dam and 1 000 per 100m in treated water leaving the local municipal sewerage facility.

Head of Univen's microbiologic water research laboratory, Natasha Potgieter, stressed that the results were from preliminary tests and that extensive further testing was necessary to gauge the full extent of the problem.

Local health authorities also confirmed a Hepatitis A outbreak but said that the health department had the situation under control and that no root cause had yet been determined.

### **Not a new problem**

"The scary thing is that this is not a new problem. Three years ago the local municipality received a (grant) of R23m to fix and upgrade the sewerage system, but the money was never used, it just disappeared," said Breytenbach.

He said that since late 2003, raw sewage had been spilling from the C-Max prison for 4,5km through the veld into the Albasini dam near the boreholes that the Makhado local municipality uses to supply water to Louis Trichardt.

He said two other sewage spills were spotted from the air three weeks ago further downstream of the Albasini dam, where farmers used the water to irrigate their crops.

"There are also sewage fountains in the town near schools, hospitals, sports facilities, private gardens and in the streets that are not included in our report," he said.

Manager of the Makhado local municipality, Faith Muthambi, blamed the Vhembe district municipality for the problem, saying that since the 2003/4 financial year the district had failed to allocate a budget to the Makhado municipality to address the water pollution.

"I only found out about this problem recently, when the STPA and TAU-SA North sent me the report and letter about their tests. As I am talking to you now, I am wearing an overall inspecting the sites myself," she said on Wednesday.

She said the district municipality had R300 million that was supposed to be spent on sewerage systems and addressing water pollution in the district over the last three years, but that was nothing was allocated to Makhado.

Muthambi confirmed that the municipality received a R23m grant in the 2003/4 financial year for sewerage and water treatment, but was unable to say how the money was spent.

"There are still rotten potatoes in the office that should be removed. They are probably the ones who failed to fix the sewerage problem when they received the R23 million three years ago," she said.

She said that a report would be compiled and the problem fixed.