



Overflow of litter during a storm event

How to stop pollution and silt control structures from becoming white elephants

SRK HAS BEEN involved in the design and implementation of various pollution control structures throughout South Africa over the past 20 years, including in-line and off-line facilities for both the private and the public sector.

But after all these years there are very few pollution control structures that are still operating effectively; the root cause being that there is seldom an operational maintenance plan or programme in place – and where there is one, it is often not implemented. Indeed, many municipalities simply do not have the capacity to develop and run these maintenance programmes, and are often restricted by budget allocations to maintain these structures on a regular basis.

So, the majority of pollution control structures are only effective for the first few months after implementation, but are soon blocked or damaged and just become dumping grounds for illegal refuse disposal.

The responsibility of stopping pollution from discharging into the natural environment is supposed to be done at the point of source by the property owner, but monitoring of the private sector's pollution control structures is difficult, as the properties where they are located are often inaccessible.

In addition, companies in many industries have installed oil separators, but have never emptied them, leaving them buried or vandalised and forgotten. As a result, the oil flows directly through the structure into the formalised stormwater system during a storm event. Unless the oil is regularly skimmed from these facilities, they might as well not be installed. Their impact may even be worse than nothing at all, as the companies may be under the false impression that they need do no more to deal with the problem.

Municipalities then end up trying to cope with the excessive volumes of litter, debris, oil and silt that have been



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For the past two decades SRK Consulting partner Murray Sim has watched millions of rand being spent on controlling pollution in South African cities and towns. Now, he says, we need to stop wasting money.