

Load shedding hampering efficiency, effectiveness of waste management sector

Along with numerous other sectors in the South African economy, the waste management industry is facing several operational challenges due to load shedding, says Mpendulo Ginindza, president of the Institute of Waste Management of Southern Africa (IWMSA).



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“Load shedding disrupts the regular schedule of waste collection services in South Africa,” says Ginindza, adding that the effectiveness of electric-powered waste collection vehicles and machinery is significantly dependent on a steady supply of electricity.

“Waste management also has a logistical aspect. Collection, transportation and disposal is scheduled. With load shedding, we have also seen how the flow of traffic is affected. There are some critical facilities that handle hazardous waste which is treated by electricity-powered equipment,” she says.

“Incinerators, autoclaves and temperature-controlled storerooms need a steady supply of electricity to run. Health facilities have reported huge increases in their diesel costs when higher stages of load shedding are implemented.

“These services are greatly affected by load shedding, which causes delays and missed collections. Waste builds up in neighborhoods, business districts, and public areas, creating unsanitary conditions and raising the risk of disease transmission.”



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Waste buildup can be harmful to environment

Ginindza asserts that load shedding has a substantial impact on landfills, incinerators, and recycling plants, among other

waste treatment facilities.

“To function at their best, these facilities frequently need a steady supply of electricity. Without electricity, waste treatment procedures are suspended or interrupted, which results in an accumulation of untreated garbage,” she adds.

“Waste that builds up in landfills can release toxic gases and other harmful substances into the environment, contaminating nearby water, soil, and air sources. As waste decomposes in landfills without proper treatment, methane gas, a potent greenhouse gas, is released into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.”

She goes on to explain that the lack of electricity during load shedding also limits recycling capacity, leading to a higher volume of waste being sent to landfills instead of being recycled or repurposed.

“There are some waste treatment and recycling facilities that have had to close down or turn down waste because they are unable to handle the load. South African waste management companies have a wider footprint that goes beyond our borders; this problem has also had an impact on the neighbouring countries which are dependent on our services.”



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“Accumulated waste attracts vermin, such as rats and flies, which can spread diseases to humans. It also creates breeding grounds for mosquitoes, contributing to the spread of malaria and other vector-borne diseases,” Ginindza cautions.

“The uncollected waste may release foul odours and toxic substances, compromising air quality and causing respiratory issues among the population. Additionally, the lack of electricity in waste treatment facilities hampers the sterilisation and safe disposal of medical waste, further jeopardising public health.”

Economy, tourism industry bears the brunt

Waste management plays a big role in the South African economy and the impact of load shedding in this sector has serious repercussions, says Ginindza.

“Waste management firms and governments may incur higher expenditures as a result of missed waste collection dates and ineffective waste treatment procedures.

“Additionally, the damaging environmental repercussions could hurt tourism, a major source of income for the country.

Visitors may be turned away by unsanitary circumstances brought on by load shedding-related rubbish piling - harming South Africa's image as a premium travel destination," concludes Ginindza.

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