

Help curb vehicle emissions

PRETORIA: South Africa should not underestimate the impact of vehicle emissions on air quality and the environment, says Environmental Affairs Department Director General, Nosipho Gcaba.

"Although developed countries with high car ownership and usage are the main culprits, they are taking steps to change their travel behaviour so that they reduce their negative impact on the environment," she said at the non-motorised transport conference in Johannesburg on Friday, 3 August 2012.

Countries in the developing world, such as South Africa, were fast becoming high polluters and something needed to be done, Gcaba said.

She said the conference was but one of several national, regional and international forums in which government was sourcing best practice, with a view to craft policy and activate behavioural changes that will ensure action is taken now to save the future.

"We need to also take cognisance of the positive role our hosting of COP17 made in raising awareness of our Greening Programme but also in mobilising our partners to take action and make a difference. This has manifested in our cities, provinces and national departments approaching and promoting various greening initiatives in line with the Greening Programme."

Gcaba encouraged walking and cycling as other options to minimise carbon emissions.

South Africa's "inherited legacy" has manifested a deliberate spatial distortion that left the majority of its citizens living in peri-urban areas, far removed not only from many basic services such as health care and government administration buildings, but also far removed from their places of work in factories, city centres, mines and suburban areas.

This, said Gcaba, coupled with a formal public transport system that was designed to serve a few, led to the majority of citizens having to contend with long travel distances and unreliable, unsafe and fragmented public transport.

"This has created a situation of an unsustainable reliance on motor vehicles and the tendencies for many of our citizens to purchase cars as soon as they are able afford them, in order to meet their travel needs."

The increasing car usage, traffic congestion, poor public transport and reliance on fossil fuels were amongst the reasons for the massive contribution to poor air quality.

"The ever deteriorating air quality also affects the health of our people and ultimately our quality of life, which invariably

contributes to the negative impact of climate change," she said.

A 2003 Department of Transport survey found, amongst others, that 2 259 million or 23% of the workforce indicated that they were walking to their places of work. In metropolitan areas, about 8.7% were walking, whereas figures for urban and rural areas were much higher, respectively 24% and 51.8%.

The survey also indicated that 90.6% of the 7.5 million learners in rural areas were walking to schools and educational centres.

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