



Leaders in Environmental Management

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New EIA regulations unveiled

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Pretoria - Revised regulations, aimed at making the processing of environmental impact assessment (EIA) applications "quicker, simpler and better", were unveiled by Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk in Pretoria on Wednesday.

Among the important features of the new regulations - to be promulgated in the Government Gazette on Friday and to come into effect on July 1 - is the introduction of compulsory timeframes.

Van Schalkwyk said: "Under the new regulations, authorities will be obliged to deliver within 14 days for purely administrative actions, within 45 days for review and decision-making on minor reports, and between 60 and 105 days for review and decision-making on complex reports."

He said another big change was the reworking of activities dividing an EIA into nine "thematic areas", including property development, energy generation and industrial activities.

EIA process is bogged down

These had been further divided into two schedules based on the nature and associated risk of the activity.

Van Schalkwyk said: "Those in schedule 1, such as transformation of land to develop residential areas larger than three hectares, will now be subject to only a basic assessment process, while those in schedule 2, like power stations, will require a thorough assessment process (scoping and EIA)."

He said the processing of EIAs was currently bogged down by the number of relatively minor applications that needed processing, and the process "was not as streamlined as it could be".

Van Schalkwyk said: "We don't want to spend our energy on relatively minor applications."

Since EIA regulations were introduced in 1997, provincial and national government had received more than 43 600 applications, of which 6.5% had taken more than two years to process.

Developers entitled to an answer

Van Schalkwyk said this was "unacceptable".

He said developers making huge investments were entitled to an answer on their applications within a reasonable time.

Environmental affairs deputy director-general, Joanne Yawitch, said the department had held "extensive consultations" with the interim certification board, a body representing EIA practitioners.

The department was encouraging the establishment of a regulatory authority for the industry, including a certification process and a code of conduct.

Once in place - "some time in 2007" - only registered practitioners would be allowed to do EIAs, and the regulations would be amended accordingly.