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Media Statement

For Immediate Release

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City of Johannesburg provides update on persistent sulphur-like odour

Residents across various parts of the City including Sandton, Randburg, Roodepoort, Fourways, as well as areas outside of the city boundary reported a strong sulphur-like odour in the air that was first noticed on 16 January 2026 and again on 9 March 2026.

In response, the City of Johannesburg's Environment and Infrastructure Services Department (EISD) accordingly initiated an investigation using its air quality monitoring network.

City Manager Dr Floyd Brink confirmed that the City immediately activated its technical monitoring and investigation processes following reports from residents.

"Protecting the health and wellbeing of residents remains our priority. Our technical teams are actively monitoring air quality data and working with other spheres of government to determine the source of the odour and ensure residents are kept informed," said Dr Brink.

Over the past two days, weather conditions in Johannesburg have been typical of late summer, characterised by warm temperatures, humid air, and occasional rainfall. Such atmospheric conditions can sometimes support odour episodes like those experienced on 16 January 2026.

Monitoring data confirmed elevated levels of hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) at the Buccleuch and Alexandra monitoring stations. On 9 March, fluctuating concentrations were recorded, with more pronounced spikes observed on 10 March at both stations.

According to Dr Tebogo Modiba, Executive Director of the Environment and Infrastructure Services Department, technical monitoring confirmed measurable odour-related compounds during the episode.

"At the Alexandra station, H₂S concentrations peaked at approximately 36–37 parts per billion (ppb), while sulphur dioxide (SO₂) peaked at around 52 ppb," explained Dr Modiba.

While these short-term spikes were detected, overall pollutant concentrations remained generally low and close to background levels. The levels recorded are sufficient to produce a noticeable odour but remain below concentrations typically associated with significant health

risks. The “rotten egg” smell reported by residents is commonly associated with hydrogen sulphide.

The City is periodically affected by transboundary pollution sources, and this matter has been escalated to the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and the Gauteng Department of Environment, which are responsible for addressing cross-boundary emissions. The characteristics of the odour are consistent with emissions typically associated with activities within the Highveld industrial complex.

Dr Modiba added that the City’s Air Quality Management Unit continues to analyse air quality data and monitor dispersion patterns to better understand the origin and movement of the odour plume.

It is important to note that the City of Johannesburg does not host major heavy industrial operations. All listed industrial facilities within the city are licensed and regularly monitored by the Environmental Management Inspectorate to ensure compliance with environmental legislation.

As a precaution, residents are advised to remain indoors during periods of strong sulphur-like odours and to avoid strenuous outdoor activity. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children, and individuals with respiratory conditions, should be monitored for symptoms such as eye or throat irritation, headaches, dizziness, or fatigue.

The EISD Air Quality Management Unit will continue working with other spheres of government to identify the source of the odour. Complaints will be monitored closely as weather conditions improve and pollutant dispersion increases.

The City remains committed to protecting the health and wellbeing of its residents and will provide updates as more information becomes available. Air Quality Monitoring information is available on the South African Air Quality Information System (SAAQIS).

Ends

Issued by the City of Johannesburg

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