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# Illegal dumping affects us and the environment

By **Khulekani Ngcobo**

It is no longer uncommon to see or find huge piles of wastes, old house items, construction waste or used products dumped by the roadside, in forests and non-designated dumping sites.

This trend is on the rise and is increasingly becoming a problem because it hinders the objective of keeping the environment clean and can have a serious impact on our lives. Illegal dumping in water drains could pose a significant problem in the case of flooding.

Storm drains are designed for catching rain water only. Dumping trash or other pollutants down storm drain inlets is illegal and has environmental, social and economic effects.

The constitution of SA guarantees everyone the right of access to an environment that is not harmful to their health and

wellbeing and to have the natural environment protected for the benefit of current and future generations.

The public's continual disregard for the environment, including severe littering, caused stormwater drain blockages that occurred during heavy rains. During the past week's downpour, which hit the KZN capital, Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith, a number of drains were blocked. This is because of accumulation of litter clogging the drains.

We also know that much of the existing infrastructure that manages water to flow out of our cities is vulnerable and outdated. We are talking about infrastructure that is old.

During and after the devastating floods thousands of us gave our time and money to help friends, family and neighbours to recover.

It is sad because our people are

losing business due to water flowing on the roads, supermarkets and causing mammoth potholes. We need to understand that the main function of roads is the carrying of vehicular, cycle and pedestrian traffic.

However, they also have a stormwater management function. During minor storm events the two functions should not be in conflict.

In major storm events the traffic function will be interrupted, the flood control function becomes more important and the roads will act as channels. Good road layout can substantially reduce stormwater-system and road-maintenance costs.

A well-planned road layout can reduce the total stormwater system costs. When integrated with a major system this may obviate the need for underground stormwater conduits. A key

element is that the road layout should be designed to follow the natural contour of the land (Miles 1984). Coordinated planning with the road and drainage engineers is crucial at the pre-feasibility stage.

So, if we all work together to take action and invest in our own properties, we can help reduce the threat of similar levels of flooding in the future. Generally, if we are mindful of what we put down our drains it is likely we won't need to clear them of debris very often. However, clogs can happen and it is important we know how to fix these problems as well as how to keep our drains well-maintained.

Hence, we are calling everyone to keep our storm drains clean by keeping our yard waste in a bin or container, keeping a tight lid on our trash cans, and raking up leaves and debris on your property. ■ Ngcobo is a communicator in the department of water and sanitation