

Blowey Residents Spend Child Grants on Paraffin

By Vincent Lali

Date of release: 01 May 2024

Shack dwellers have been living without electricity since October last year, when a fire destroyed 150 of their shacks in Blowey informal settlement, Khayelitsha. Community leader, Sbu Rhathiya said the fire victims now want Eskom to install electricity boxes in their newly rebuilt shacks. "You can't stay with kids in a dark, unlit shack because they become frightened. A three-month-old baby can't survive without electricity. You can't boil water to make food for them at night," he said.

Without electricity, residents use candles for light and fire or gas to cook. "Some residents go to the bush to collect firewood to cook because their electricity boxes have not yet been installed," said Rhathiya.

Phumeza Tofile said her kids go to nearby RDP houses to do their homework in the evenings because it's dark inside her shack. "They go to adjacent houses to do their homework because they are well-lit. They can't say to their teachers they don't do their homeworks because we have no electricity," she said.

Tofile uses a flame stove to cook and boil water. "Because a litre of paraffin doesn't last even a day, I borrow money from loan shacks to buy more paraffin," she said. She depends on her kids' grants and having borrowed R350 from a mashonisa to buy paraffin, will have to pay R500 on child grant day. "Eskom must stop taking its time to install electricity boxes in our shacks," she said.

Ziyanda Qumse said lack of electricity supply forced her mother to buy a rechargeable lamp in January. "She used my siblings' government grants to buy the lamp so that we can have light at night," she said. Her mother lights the lamp when her children do homework and when she prepares to go to work in the morning. "The lamp becomes flat quickly, so we tell the kids to do their homework quickly so that my mom can have light in the morning before she goes to work," Qumse said. She and her mother sleep early and switch off the lamp to save the battery, leaving it with friends to charge during the day and collect it later in the evening.

Qumse said before her mother got a job as a pre-school teacher in February and bought a gas stove, she used to spend all the children's grant money on paraffin. "My mom used to borrow money from loan sharks, spend R300 on paraffin weekly and pay them back on grant day," she said.

Qumse said the lack of electricity prevents her from using electrical appliances. "We can't store food in the fridge or buy meat in large quantities. We buy it and eat it all immediately," she said.

Ward councilor Thando Pimpi said: "I submitted a list of the fire victims to Eskom in January. Now we are waiting for it to install the electricity boxes. I have done my bit. Eskom approved 122 requests for installation of electricity boxes. Other requests could not be approved because of small errors that can be fixed," he said.

Kyle Cookson, Eskom spokesperson, said: "Eskom is still in the process of restoring electricity to customers in the areas of Blowey in Khayelitsha, and Never Never in Philippi, who were affected by fires. Eskom has completed construction of the overhead infrastructure and is in the process of reconnecting the customers," he said, committing that Eskom will install new electricity boxes in Blowey at the end of April.

This article was syndicated from Elitsha (<https://elitshanews.org.za/>) and was originally published on 25 April 2024.