

Streetlights Targeted by Drug Addicts and Thieves in Dobsonville

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The community of Dobsonville, Soweto, is facing a new drug-related crisis. Nyaope (a composite drug chiefly made from heroin) users are now damaging streetlight infrastructure to reach the fluorescent powder inside the bulbs. Some residents believe the vandals are searching for phosphor powder, although experts say streetlight vandalism is more commonly linked to copper theft. The drug addicts damage the township infrastructure day by day and street by street.

According to online sources, the phosphor coating found in streetlight bulbs is a "mix of rare-earth oxides" including yttrium, europium, lanthanum, cerium, and terbium.

Dobsonville has increasingly become a target for petty thieves who also have use for these streetlight poles, and drug users, both local and from beyond the township area. There has been a series of these damages to streetlight poles. Community members say that every night they wonder which one the vandals will burn next. Individual families who live in front of the street poles, especially near the cemetery, report witnessing the burning of the poles. They say that they cannot do anything without the help and support of the community.

Several residents have made a call to the rest of the community and shared the photos of the suspected people.

Community member, sis Thembi said, "They also burned our street pole around 1 pm," while Tate Majalefa, reported that "in the streets of Baba uThula, two streetlight [poles] are burned down". Now the community is scared that the remaining two streetlights near the cemetery will also suffer the same fate. The cemetery is a hotspot for robbery.

"We cannot speak of the government or the councillor, a person who must do the repairs on the community infrastructure when it is broken. We still have big potholes and damaged buildings that need to be fixed, but our government is not interested in the business of growing the country or the community, said the young Nthabiseng Khoza.

The fight continues over poor service delivery in working class communities where unemployment is also rife. Poverty is fuelling the theft and damage to infrastructure, such as streetlight poles, for scrap value.

"We deserve better lives, also as the working class we shouldn't suffer, so that we end up robbing each other, even the things that are helpful to us as the community," said Lihle Makhubo.

Mama Marianne said, "I do believe that with us together as the community, we will give out good results with the street poles issue. If we face it and fight it together as the community, we shall win. We cannot suffer like this."

The community of Dobsonville is also trying so hard together to find ways to catch the suspect in action. "Togetherness is the key as the community of Dobsonville Ext 4," said Tate Majalefa

*While a belief exists that the reason behind the breakage of streetlights is a hunt for recreational drug use, this may not be correct. The prevalent reason drug users and petty criminals damage streetlight infrastructure is due to the bits of copper and other materials that can be resold, found inside the streetlights, and in traffic lights.

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