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## **Municipality disconnects illegal electricity connections in Bophelong**

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The Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM) has intensified its campaign to disconnect and remove all illegal connections across Emfuleni. Working with the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Emfuleni Electricity Department removed illegal connections in the informal settlement, Marikana in Bophelong (in the Vaal area in Gauteng), on 10 May 2020.

The Marikana informal settlement is located between extension 14 and 15 in Bophelong, and has been there for about two months. Its residents were removed from Joko Tea informal settlement (also in the Vaal area) to the Marikana settlement as a temporary measure before they are moved to RDP housing. The ELM removed electric cables from several houses in Extension 14 which were illegally supplying and selling electricity to residents of the Marikana informal settlement. The operation began before 10:00 and was concluded by 12:30 on the same day. No stone was left unturned as they removed all illegally connected cables.

Residents voiced opposition to the disconnections. Duduzile Moumi said, "I can't stay in the house with no food and electricity. If this is how the municipality operates against black South Africans during COVID-19, then shame on the Municipality." The community feels that the Emfuleni municipality took advantage of the lockdown to oppress the poor.

The Municipality said it had been experiencing an overloading of electricity infrastructure because of the illegal connections, which caused a shortage of power in Bophelong extensions. "Illegal connections pose great risks as it overloads the transformers. That is why the power connections trip or fail, meaning no one in the area would have electricity. And it can also cause fire," said an ELM representative.

The representative pointed out that ELM electricity connection equipment is based on the number of people in the households. He emphasised that people should only use authorised ELM personnel or qualified electricians to connect their electricity, and with permission from ELM. But the ELM does not take into account the many people who live in informal settlements and also need electricity. Many have been waiting for too long, and resorted to illegal connections.

The ELM spokesperson said, "We will discuss several different measures that the municipality can take to improve security and ELM will continue to take a strong action against illegal connections." He also asked the community to educate children about illegal connections.

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