

The Environmental Lady

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Lt Col Roshni Varaden

Lt Col Roshni Varaden is the SO1 Regional Environmental Manager for KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape and is based at the Regional Facilities Interface Management Office Durban. She was previously with the Area Military Health Unit KZN, where she worked as a Chief Environmental Health Officer. This career change shifted her focus from the impact of an unhealthy environment on DOD members to that of the impact of military activities on the environment.

The main function of the Regional Environmental Manager is to co-ordinate, monitor, advise and guide the implementation of environmental programmes and projects. The implementation of environmental management programmes and projects is a function of Army Support Bases in the DOD. The Army Support Bases in the Regional Facilities Interface Management Durban area of responsibility face numerous challenges with the implementation of environmental management. The challenges of note are:

- That the structure for environmental management, as is required by SA Army Office/CD Force Struc/401/1/P of April 1999, *Concept of SA Army (D Force Structure) Policy Directive/Facilities Management*, has not been adhered to.
- That members who have been staffed in environmental posts are not qualified in the environmental field.
- Lastly, that few or no funds are available for the environmental function.

Lt Col Varaden stated that her liaison with external environmental role players, such as the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, has been instrumental in

overcoming some of these shortcomings. These organisations have the environmental expertise that is lacking within the DOD and they are willing to assist the DOD in spite of their own shortage of capacity and resources.

Lt Col Varaden has secured assistance from the University of KZN and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to assist with the updating of the ecological management plan for the Bluff Military Base. The sustainable management of training areas is not only of importance to the environment, but is also critical to sustain military training activities. The above-mentioned organisations are also called upon to provide environmental education to environmental service members of the Army Support Bases. Thus these members have been empowered to implement some environmental projects.

National days of environmental importance (eg National Water Week and National Arbor Week) are utilised to create an environmental awareness among members of the DOD. However, this is a piecemeal effort and does not secure the full co-operation of all members in finding solutions to environmental challenges in the DOD. It is important that that all DOD members understand the close ties between military activities and the environment. The environment and the concept of Integrated Environmental Management must be worked into all military courses. Furthermore, the environmental education of DOD members at management level is vital to overcome the obstacles that impede the implementation of Integrated Environmental Management.

Lt Col Varaden has been appointed as the DOD's Regional Co-ordinator for Operation VUSELELA. Operation VUSELELA is a joint project between the DOD and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. The aim of Operation VUSELELA is to remove



Lt Col Roshni Varaden, our environmental specialist.

invasive alien plants from DOD controlled property. The term "alien plant" refers to a tree, creeper or shrub, which has its place of origin outside the South African sub-continent. Alien plants must be controlled, as they grow rapidly and easily out-compete local plants and utilise vast quantities of water. (The removal of alien plants is governed by the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act No. 43 of 1983.) In addition to the environmental benefits, Operation VUSELELA also has social benefits, eg poverty alienation. Unemployed military veterans are recruited by the Service Corps as workers for Operation VUSELELA.

The withdrawal of the DOD from the Hellsgate Training Area is another interesting project that Lt Col Varaden is currently involved in. The Hellsgate Training Area is situated on a declared World Heritage Site, which is due to be handed over to the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park Authority in March 2006. The DOD will, however, have to rehabilitate the Hellsgate Training Area prior to its withdrawal.

An environmental impact audit was conducted in September 2004. (Continued on page 20)