

Greenies at AFB Ysterplaat

By Col Kobus Butler, Officer Commanding AFB Ysterplaat

A few years ago Air Force Base Ysterplaat was identified, together with some other bases, for closing down as part of the restructuring of military institutions. A decision to close down the base and to relocate to Cape Town International as an air force station was communicated to all its members.

The infrastructure of the base deteriorated rapidly. The maintenance and safeguarding of buildings, gardens and equipment were not of great concern or

a priority to many members. From an environmental point of view waste increased tremendously in the natural and built-up area, alien vegetation increased and no garden maintenance was carried out.

A surprise announcement came early in 2003 of a strategic policy decision reversal: the base was to remain open. The base was left with the major task of picking up the pieces, positive restructuring and redirecting energies.

As part of the beautification of the base all its members were involved in removing alien vegetation and planting indigenous trees and shrubs.

Negotiations with the DOD Working for Water Programme resulted in the removal of 74 hectares of alien Port Jackson and Rooikrans trees. A gardening service contract was also introduced to the base in July 2004 to maintain the domestic areas.

A clean-up campaign was launched on the base to remove all old equipment, rubble and scrap metal. A comprehensive effort from all the members, especially during planned environmental days has seen tons of waste leaving the base. Over the past three years more than 50 tons of scrap metal was removed from the base.

An integrated management awareness programme was started and this has resulted in an initiative to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. A review of all the base activities has resulted in the setting of objectives and the identification of key environmental priorities. The building of a separator pit at the diesel point to minimise possible pollution in the area was one of the priorities decided on in 2005.

A quarterly environmental award was introduced to encourage members to improve the way things were done. This award is based on the evaluation of FSEs or sections and has the following criteria: housekeeping, facilities maintenance and environmental management. FSEs or sections are awarded when they excel in the above categories.

The corrective actions being taken are decreasing the risks and increasing effectiveness. The inception of this award has resulted in remarkable enthusiasm and changes in all areas of involvement on the base.

There was another very important development at AFB Ysterplaat during the water restrictions in the Cape Town Metropole. The condition of the gardens on the base deteriorated to such an extent that the trees and plants were dying and alternative water resources had to be investigated. The suggestion of using treated effluent water from the local municipality treatment plant to irrigate the gardens was then implemented with great success. That initiative has contributed tremendously towards water saving and the beautification of the base. A great amount of energy and resources was also directed to the upgrading of facilities as part of the effort to restore the dignity and pride of all the members. Other positive developments are the increased involvement of the local community in the events of the base.

In its journey towards excellence AFB Ysterplaat was recently awarded the Best Base in Environmental Management System in the Western Cape Region for 2005. The base also enjoyed two finalist positions at the annual DOD Environmental Awards ceremony held on 8 June 2006 at AFB Makhado - namely the Base Environmental Management, and Conservamus Awards for Water Efficiency. 



Indigenous (water-wise) trees were planted at AFB Ysterplaat.



The upgraded AFB Ysterplaat Headquarters.