# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 904**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 08)**

**Dr S SThembekwayo (EFF) to ask the Minister of Health:**

Whether he has been informed that the Letaba Hospital in Tzaneen, Limpopo, disposes of its toxic waste in the Limpopo River; if not, (a) what steps will he take to stop the practice and (b) will the persons responsible for this practice be held accountable; if so, (i) on what legal and administrative provisions does the hospital rely for the disposal, (ii) has he found that the disposal of the toxic waste in the river complies with applicable legislation and (iii) who approved the disposal of toxic waste into the river?

###### NW986E

**REPLY:**

Honourable Member, I am aware of the problems of waste being pumped into Letaba River in Tzaneen in Limpopo, and not into the Limpopo River as the question suggests.

This issue appeared in some print media on 13 March 2018. Here are correct facts:

(a) According to the Limpopo Department of Health, there is no evidence that the Letaba Hospital disposes of its toxic waste in the Limpopo River.

 If by toxic waste you mean medical waste, there is a contracted service provider who collects the medical waste on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of every week. The Provincial Health Office and Letaba Hospital are in possession of the certificate of safe disposal issued by the service provider.

 Hence it is not possible for any medical waste to be pumped from the hospital into the river.

 However, what happened is this:

 The hospital effluent is pumped into a municipal reservoir. Other facilities and households also pump into the same municipal reservoir. When Eskom had problems with the municipality not paying their electricity dues, Eskom cut off the electricity supply to the municipality. Hence their reservoir pumping mechanisms were affected and effluent then leaked into the river.

 The fact that inside the effluent there were some toxic and dangerous medical waste DOES NOT MEAN it originated from the Hospital. The Hospital is able to account for all the medical waste which is disposed of as I said above.

 What we believe could have happened is that other practitioners or facilities which generate medical waste could be discharging same into municipal effluent system.

 I have asked the Environmental Section in the National Department of Health to put pressure and also work with the municipality's Environmental Health Practitioners to look into the matter to establish the origin of this medical waste. It cannot have originated from the Hospital, unless the Hospital was given a false certificate by the waste disposal company.

 We will also be happy if the green scorpions could look into the issue.

(b) Yes, definitely whoever the toxic or medical waste originated from will have to be held accountable.

 (i), (ii) and (iii) The Hospital is not disposing any toxic or medical waste into the river and nobody ever authorised the disposal of toxic waste from the Hospital into the Limpopo river, Letaba river of any other river for that matter.

END.