

Organised crime syndicates target SA petroleum pipelines

By Jeandré van der Walt July 3, 2020 12:58 pm



Transnet has said that it was struggling to keep up with maintenance demands to its networks due to the high incidence of theft along its petroleum pipeline network

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South Africa is currently facing a serious shortage of diesel as a result of theft and vandalism along Transnet's 3 800km fuel pipeline network.

According to Transnet, a significant increase in theft had been witnessed since the beginning of the 2020 financial year.

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In the past three months, Transnet had recorded 38 incidents along its pipeline, of which 34 cases were confirmed theft cases, and the remaining attempted theft incidents. In the prior financial year, there were a total of 181 such incidents.

According to the company, the thefts had mainly occurred in Gauteng and Mpumalanga. However, the incidents had become more sporadic along its entire network recently.

"Repair teams are moving from one site to another and are at the point of exhaustion," said Transnet in a presentation to the South African Petroleum Industry Association.

The pipeline network traverses five provinces and transports 250 million liters of petrol and diesel per week.

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Transnet said evidence obtained about the modus operandi of the criminals pointed to a well-organised and equipped gang being involved. "Criminals operate in groups, each with a specific task. These criminals are found to be armed, [and they have] no fear for their personal safety."

The company added that the majority of perpetrators arrested were foreign nationals.

Transnet also said the criminals approached landowners and promised them financial compensation in exchange for access to land and pipelines.

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Agri SA recently expressed concern about the continuous vandalism and theft of diesel by well-organised syndicates. A shortage of diesel due to theft, and the risk prolonged shortages could have on food security, were of particular concern.

To counter these thefts, Transnet said it was implementing various initiatives to address theft incidents.

This involved the deployment of tactical response teams at identified hot spots. In addition, eight drones that were operational 24 hours per day had been deployed.

Reports of these thefts had also been brought to the attention of the Minister of Public Enterprises, Pravin Gordhan, who would be further engaging with the Minister of Police, Bheki Cele. According to Transnet, these initiatives had yielded positive results thus far.

"[Up to] March, 84 arrests had been made, 30 fuel tankers and 25 private vehicles impounded, 75 criminal cases opened and the suspects were charged with tampering with essential

farmer's weekly

