

Pretoria Court Hands Down a 35-Year Sentence to a Fuel Thief

[Durban, 27 August 2024] Transnet Pipelines (TPL) welcomes the recent 35-year sentence imposed on Shedi Mhlanga, a Zimbabwean national, for tampering with essential infrastructure, theft of fuel, and possession of stolen property. This verdict, delivered on 26 August 2024 at the Pretoria Regional Court, highlights the serious consequences of crimes that threaten South Africa's critical infrastructure.

The case dates back to 31 December 2022, when TPL's Network Operations Centre (NOC) detected a significant pressure drop on the Kendal to Waltloo pipeline around 01:55. Security teams were promptly deployed and they identified a suspicious fuel tanker near a known hotspot in the Boschkop area. The driver, later identified as Shedi Mhlanga, attempted to flee by abandoning the moving vehicle and escaping into nearby bushes. However, the ground teams quickly apprehended Mhlanga. Subsequent investigations revealed that an illegal fitting had been welded into the pipeline, facilitating the theft of 33,994 liters of petrol. The stolen fuel was recovered and confirmed to match the TPL product from the pipeline.

TPL Chief Executive, Sibongiseni Khathi, commented on the court's decision: "This verdict sends a clear message that tampering with critical infrastructure and stealing our nation's resources are grave offenses that will not go unpunished. The sentence reflects the seriousness of the crime and its impact on both the economy and society. We are proud of the swift and effective response from our security teams and the collaboration with law enforcement that led to this outcome."

On 8 July 2024, Mhlanga was found guilty on all charges. The court has now sentenced him as follows:

- **Count 1: Tampering with essential infrastructure** – 20 years imprisonment
- **Count 2: Theft of fuel** – 10 years imprisonment (to run concurrently with Count 1)
- **Count 3: Possession of stolen property (fuel tanker)** – five years imprisonment (to run concurrently with Count 1)

In total, Mhlanga has been sentenced to 35 years, with 20 years of direct imprisonment.

TPL Pipelines will continue to work closely with law enforcement agencies to combat such crimes and remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding our infrastructure and ensuring the security of our national assets.

TPL encourages the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities or incidents along our pipelines to the **Tip-Offs Anonymous Hotline: 0800 003 056**

Ends



Issued on behalf of Transnet Pipelines Chief Executive, Mr Sibongiseni Khathi

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