



**Family Digest 18**  
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**The Use of Pit Latrines in Schools**

While the civil claim against the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the matter of the death by drowning of little Michael Bopape in a pit latrine at a school in Limpopo was awaiting judgement, came the appalling news of yet another death of a small child, Lumka Mketwa, in a pit latrine at a school in the Bizana district of the Eastern Cape.

There are about four million pit latrines in use across the country where proper sanitation is not available. According to the DBE's 2016 statistics, more than 9 000 schools have only pit latrines for toilets and they are in common use at schools for little children. These tragedies give rise to several questions: What has made these latrines so dangerous? Why were there no safety measures to prevent the children from falling in? Why did these children drown? (If the latrines had been properly constructed and maintained there would not have been sufficient effluent in them to cause drowning.) Why was the supervision of the school yard so lax that that it was possible for both these children to be missing for some hours before being found? Why in the period since the death of Michael Komape have no measures been put in place for the better maintenance of these toilets? Why has there been so little oversight of a matter that is in plain sight? And how many other children have had the emotionally traumatic and physiologically dangerous experience of falling into such a latrine, even if they did not drown?

A quick Google search demonstrates that there is a science to the proper maintenance of this form of sanitation. If correctly constructed, appropriately managed, and used under proper supervision, these latrines would not constitute such a hazardous threat to the health and well-being of children. The links below are illustrative of the above.

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<http://www.enca.com/south-africa/grade-0-learner-dies-after-plunging-school-pit-toilet>

<http://ewn.co.za/2018/02/02/michael-komape-section-27-hopes-govt-accounts-for-failure-to-build-safe-toilets>

<http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2018/03/16/angie-under-fire-as-girl-5-dies-in-school-pit-latrine>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-03-16-human-rights-investigation-into-eastern-cape-schools-after-girl-drowns-in-pit-toilet>

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Limpopo-boys-drowns-in-pit-toilet-20150205>

<http://observers.france24.com/en/20140121-death-schoolboy-toilet-sanitation-south-africa-schools>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-11-13-lawsuit-starts-over-2014-pit-toilet-drowning-in-limpopo-school/>

<https://city-press.news24.com/News/new-alarming-stats-reveal-4600-schools-still-have-pit-toilets-20170302>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-15-15-million-small-children-in-sa-dont-have-toilets-at-home/>

<https://www.google.co.za/search?q=pit+latrines+in+south+africa&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiy797v37HaAhUEvBQKHb2GAesQ7AkIUQ&biw=10>