

Labour dept officials 'working in a danger zone'

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Labour dept officials 'working in a danger zone' By Sandi Kwon Hoo - May 13, 2020 67 Union members were advised to report for duty but not to work in non-compliant offices. OFFICIALS at the Department of Labour's offices in Kimberley refused to enter the building on Wednesday, citing non-compliance with the Covid-19 regulations. The Public Servants Association (PSA) said it had advised its members to report for duty as of May 13 but not to work in non-compliant offices. PSA provincial labour relations officer Russle Bindeman believed that staff should not be recalled to work until the workplace complied with the Covid-19 regulations. "The majority of Department of Labour offices in the Province have not been deep-cleaned. The temperatures of members of the public, as well as officials, are not being screened and there is no register to keep track of who is entering the building ... In the event of an outbreak there will be no records to contact persons who may be infected. Officials are unable to assist walk-ins as the facility has not been decontaminated," said Bindeman on Wednesday. He added that the regulations were put in place to prevent and curb Covid-19 infections. "Yet the very department that is supposed to be the watchdog, is not adhering to the regulations. The department has not informed us on steps taken to ensure that all personal protective equipment is supplied and that work areas are sanitised. Our members are concerned that they are being exposed to infection as they are working in a danger zone." Bindeman stated that officials eventually entered the office on Wednesday but were not able to perform their duties. "If regulations are not followed, the department will be held accountable. The steering development committee that is supposed to oversee the implementation of the regulations is non-functional and no risk assessment was done. There is no indication of proper social distance marking, temperature and statistical screening, rationale for identified critical jobs, risk assessments, action plan, training of employees on screening and the provision of Covid 19 protocols are not forthcoming." The provincial Department of Employment and Labour said it would provide comment in the next 48 hours. Meanwhile, the Department of Employment and Labour's Inspection and Enforcement Service (IES) unit has found that two out of every five organisations inspected were not complying with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). The national spokesperson for the Department of Employment and Labour, Teboho Thejane, said that 1 463 contravention, improvement and prohibition notices had been issued. "During inspections of 2 789 workplaces throughout the country, starting from April 30 until May 8, it was found that 1 237 organisations were not compliant," said Thejane. He stated that out of the inspections that were completed, 411 were conducted at government and or state-owned enterprises, where the rate of compliance was at 50 percent. "The department is concerned that since the introduction of lockdown Level 4, more organisations are not complying." Thejane was concerned that long queues of people were being allowed to congregate at government workplaces.