

EMPLOYEES AT RISK

# Government buildings in Pretoria breach safety laws

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SEVERAL national government departments and entities are under fire for flouting occupational health and safety laws and forcing staff to work in buildings that place their well-being at risk.

The buildings, which are around the Tshwane central business district (CBD), include the Department of Military Veterans in Hatfield, where workers are complaining that when it rains, the building gets flooded.

Staff members are unhappy that the building's basement and gym facilities are flooded daily. The Public Servants Association (PSA) complained that in February, it requested an inspection of the Department of Military Veterans building but still has not received any acknowledgment on when an inspection will be conducted.

The building on Festival Street also had a missing roller door and the system that was controlling the door was broken, which led to safety concerns as this meant the department had only one exit.

Other issues include that there was no proper ventilation in the office and the air conditioning was not working, which posed a risk to employees.

PSA chief negotiator Peter Mngomezulu said the union also received reports that the building was leaking water and, as a result, the water reached the BG electric box, which led to the cutting off of electricity.

"The problem is that the electrical problem at that building has the potential of a fire disaster. The employees are not safe and should the electrical cables mix with water, it would result in a disaster," he said, adding that the union has previously complained about non-functional lifts, water leakages, and darkness in passages.

On February 25, the Department of Employment and Labour issued a con-



THE Hallmark Building, the head office of the Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria, is one of the buildings with a number of occupational health and safety concerns for workers. | FILE

vention notice against the Government Printing Works (GPW), an entity of the Department of Home Affairs, and the entity was given 60 days to take the necessary steps to remedy the defects.

GPW was told to comply with the construction regulations and ensure that inspections of its facilities are carried out periodically or at least once every six months for the first two years and thereafter annually by competent persons in order to render the structure safe for continued use. In addition, GPW must keep records of inspections and maintenance and make them available on request by an inspector.

Electrical installations must be safe for use, be regularly maintained and have a valid certificate of compliance accompanied by a test report.

The GPW building must comply with environmental regulations for workplaces by ensuring that every workplace is ven-

tilated either naturally or mechanically.

The entity must also ensure that the air breathed by employees does not endanger their safety that the time-weighted average of carbon dioxide taken over eight-hour periods does not exceed 0.5% by volume of air.

"Following consultation with the relevant health and safety representative or committee regarding the infestation of bird faeces on workplace windows, conduct a risk assessment to determine potential exposure to hazardous biological agents," stated the direction notice issued after the inspection.

GPW must maintain all rooms and facilities in a clean, hygienic, safe, whole, and leak-free condition and a good state of repair, according to the notice.

The PSA said non-compliance with occupational health and safety laws at GPW on Bosman Street was a result of the structure of the building being dilapidated and on the brink of collapse.

"The electrical wires are a risk to employees, and hygiene standards are low. There are constant water leakages," the union added.

According to Mngomezulu, the building caught fire last month and a structural engineer issued a report and indicated that the building is uninhabitable.

"The employer does not want to share that report. Apparently, they decided to move all employees to the Visagie (Street) building as a temporary measure until permanent accommodation is secured," he said.

Mngomezulu said the PSA put pressure on the management to close the building, which they were promised would now be closed, but some managers refuse to release employees, especially those working at the factory and manufacturing section.

The departments of Military Veterans and Home Affairs, as well as GPW, had not responded to inquiries yesterday.