

MEDIA RELEASE PSA calls for stronger security measures following bomb threats at Pietermaritzburg Magistrates' Court

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about public-sector employees' safety following recent bomb threats at the Pietermaritzburg Magistrates' Court in KwaZulu-Natal.

On 29 October 2024, employees were ordered to evacuate the Pietermaritzburg Magistrates' Court in Church Street. This incident highlighted critical issues regarding management's response to such threats that put employees' lives at risk. The PSA is concerned that managers failed to release staff at the Magistrates' Court, despite the risk. In this incident, the PSA identified key safety concerns, including the lack of clear assembly points leading to confusion and panic amongst employees during an emergency. Communication failures, with inadequate and delayed information dissemination, are also of concern. The recent bomb threat was preceded by a similar threat on 23 July 2024 on the 12th floor of the Durban Magistrates' Court.

The PSA therefore demands an immediate investigation into response protocols at the Pietermaritzburg Magistrates' Court. Comprehensive and effective prevention measures should be implemented to ensure employees' safety. These include establishing clear assembly points, communicated to all employees, as directed in section 8(1) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*, stating that every employer shall ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that every employee at work is not exposed to any hazard. In addition, enhanced communication strategies must be adopted, ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination, as direct in section 8(2) of the *OHSA*, stating that "every employer shall, after consultation with the health and safety representatives, develop and implement a written policy concerning the protection of the health and safety of its employees". There is a need for regular emergency drills to familiarise employees with procedures and reduce panic during emergencies as indicated in section 9 of the *OHSA*, directing that, "every employer shall, in consultation with the health and safety representatives, develop and implement a written emergency procedure".

The PSA emphasises that for the sake of employee safety and in the event of occupational health and safety threats, the affected area should be evacuated immediately. The emergency response plan should be activated, and emergency services notified. Such measures will further ensure that members of the public who access these buildings are not at risk. Compliance with health and safety standards by authorities is essential.

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