

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **PSA condemns Mpumalanga Department of Health for exposing Matikwane Hospital employees to asbestos and unsafe working conditions**

**DATE**                                      8 October 2024

**EMBARGO**                                None

**ENQUIRIES**                             communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) strongly condemns the Mpumalanga Department of Health for its failure to protect employees at Matikwane Hospital from asbestos exposure, thereby creating an unsafe working environment.

This exposure occurred during renovations, as the Hospital was originally roofed with asbestos-containing materials. Asbestos is a hazardous material known to cause serious health conditions such as mesothelioma and other cancers. The PSA is extremely concerned that despite the employer's knowledge of these risks, employees and patients at Matikwane Hospital are being unnecessarily exposed to asbestos.

The PSA notes that whilst contractors at the site are equipped with full protective gear when removing asbestos tiles, hospital staff and patients have not been afforded the same protection. The employer has failed to provide personal protective equipment to employees, thereby placing their health and safety at significant risk. Despite repeated meetings with the employer to address these serious breaches of safety regulations, the Department has falsely claimed compliance. In addition, it suspended employees under the pretence that they were engaged in an unprotected strike, when in fact, they were exercising their legal right to withdraw from an unsafe work environment as stipulated by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. These suspensions were later lifted after the PSA challenged the unfair suspensions.

The PSA also engaged the Department of Employment and Labour. Health and Safety Inspectors have since conducted an *in-loco* inspection. The PSA awaits the outcome of this inspection. The PSA remains committed to safeguarding the health and safety of employees and will continue to demand that the Department of Health takes immediate steps to comply with asbestos regulations and protect employees at Matikwane Hospital.

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