

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19: PSA concerned on non-compliance by Human Settlements Department

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is concerned regarding reports of the non-compliance to the COVID-19 Regulations, at the National Department of Human Settlement. This after it was brought to the attention of the PSA, on 26 May 2020, that an employee who was part of the team that was tasked with disinfecting the department's workplace, tested positive to COVID-19. This non-compliance with set protocols and required interventions at the Department is a grave concern to the PSA. The protocols for the whole of the Public Service, require that where an official tests positive for COVID-19, such a person must be sent home and granted sick leave, the necessary *OHS* risk assessment must be done, to determine how and where the person got infected, in order to protect the Institution and officials working there. In this instance the employee is currently hospitalized.

The PSA demands that the employer comply with the guidelines issued by the National Department of Health, in respect of screening, medical surveillance, and testing of other employees who worked closely with the infected employee. The PSA, in addition, urges the employer to inform those who have directly and indirectly been in close contact with the infected employee to follow strict protocols in guiding them on what processes they need to follow without stigmatizing and exposing the identity of the concerned official. The PSA had previously officially addressed the issue of the employer's readiness, in terms of their contingency plans and measures for COVID-19, that should have been in place. The PSA was never provided with the required information.

According to information at our disposal, the employer has not fully complied with the measures that need to be in place, in terms of combating COVID-19, e.g. the required protocols as per legislation, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), sanitisers and temperature scanners. The PSA was informed that the PPE's are not adequate, which raises serious concerns to the readiness of the department to continue with its operations in terms of business continuity. The PSA is flooded with reports from its members across the country that many departments are not compliant with the provisions of the amended Regulations, related to PPEs, deep cleaning of offices, *etc.* to protect employees and members of the public from exposure to the pandemic. In various instances, Inspectors from the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL), had to be called to close non-compliant workplaces. The PSA will therefore not hesitate to call upon the Department of Labour, to intervene in this regard and ensure compliance before the department is allowed to resume its functions again. The PSA will always protect the rights of our members and will not allow the employer to disregard the provisions of the *OHSA*, to provide and maintain a workplace that is safe and without risk to employees.

It is for the above reasons that the PSA demands that the employer close the department with immediate effect, until the necessary processes, that include deep cleaning and disinfecting has been completed. The PSA insists that an Inspector be assigned to advise employees and employers of their rights and obligations in terms of Section 28 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to ensure compliance. The PSA urges its members to stay safe and adhere to all protocols regarding this pandemic.

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is concerned about the working progress that the Department of Education in Eastern Cape is making in preparing for Educators and Administration staff to return to school.

Instruction Note 18 was issued which indicates that Educators and non-educators will return to schools will be given a 48hours notification to return to schools as soon as the Principals confirm receipt of all Personal Protective Equipment. This was to ensure that all employees return to a safe and healthy environment at school and confident to recall learners back to school being prepared and ready for a healthy and safe school environment.

During the Steering Committee meeting held on 25 May 2020, it was reported by all Districts that the process of delivering of PPE has started on 23 May by a number of service providers that were appointed, and all the challenges encountered were escalated for the urgent attention of the Superintendent General to avoid delaying the progress.

However, the PSA is still concerned about the deep cleaning and disinfecting of school premises which has not yet been done in preparation of schools reopening on 1 June as pronounced by the Minister of Basic Education. The PSA calls on the provincial administration consider postponing the reopening on 1 June to utilise this period for school preparations to ensure that all necessary health and safety requirements are met.

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