

MEDIA RELEASE COVID-19: PSA condemns non-compliance with protocols by Department of

**Human Settlements** 

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 240 000 public servants and the majority union in the National Department of Human Settlements, is concerned about the Department's continued lack of commitment to provide adequate health and safety protection to employees against COVID-19 infections.

The PSA was recently informed that the Department decided to remove all sanitizers from all its buildings. Upon the PSA enquiry, the Department indicated that individual employees were allocated 500 ml bottles of hand sanitisers to close the safety gap. The PSA's investigation, however, revealed that the Department only provided individual employees with 250 ml bottles of hand sanitisers a few months ago, which were now depleted. The Department is still investigating the matter and no further feedback was provided to the PSA.

In the wake of numerous complaints raised by the PSA regarding the lack of appropriate protocol controls and compliance with COVID-19, it is becoming clear that the Department of Human Settlements lacks commitment to provide protection to its employees and the public against COVID-19 related hazards. Owing to the Department's indifference to issues raised by the PSA, two employees fell victim to the virus when they were forced to report for duty, despite having comorbidities. This conduct by the Department contravenes Regulations as special measures should be in place before those with comorbidities are required to report to work.

The Department is furthermore flouting COVID-19 Regulations by not taking the necessary precautions when employees contract the virus. The Department, for example, allowed an employee who was a high risk and refused to self-isolate to continue working, thus exposing other employees. Regulations issued by the President are no longer adhered to and strict requirements for decontamination and isolation to prevent the spread of the virus are disregarded.

The PSA is alarmed by the Department's lack of commitment to the safety of employees and issues a stern warning that according to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, it remains an employer's responsibility to ensure that the workplace is safe for employees to work in. The PSA also demands that as a responsible employer, the Department should comply with the Regulations and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. The PSA will not hesitate to hold the Department responsible should the safety of employees be compromised.

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