

MEDIA RELEASE: PSA welcomes shutdown of Gauteng Provincial Department buildings but warns about legal action against non-compliant departments

DATE: 12 September 2018

EMBARGO: None

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In the wake of the fatal fire in the Gauteng Department of Health Head Office in Johannesburg, the Public Servants Association (PSA) has welcomed the Gauteng Provincial Government's (GPG) decision to shut down 14 Gauteng Provincial Departmental Buildings in the City Centre pending the outcome of a technical-team investigation on the health and safety of the buildings.

Employees working in these buildings were sent home on 10 September 2018 for the remainder of the week. The GPG has appointed a technical team that will investigate all buildings to determine safety. The Premier and MECs of Gauteng will meet with labour on Wednesday, 12 September 2018 where a way forward will be discussed.

"The PSA has been at the forefront for more than four years in the campaign to ensure the health and safety of employees and members of the public at provincial government buildings in Johannesburg. Top managers and politicians in the province did not regard the issues as a priority and dragged their feet in relocating departments to safer buildings. The PSA in the past had to deal with many complains and incidents where members were injured or became sick directly owing to the conditions of buildings. Sadly, it took the death of three dedicated fire fighters before the GPG decided to act," said PSA Provincial Manager in Gauteng, Monica Venter.

The PSA has been warning government over a considerable period about the safety of the buildings. "The closure of these buildings is an overdue step in the right direction. It is trusted that employees will now be accommodated in a healthy and safe environment," said Ms Venter, adding that it was not only provincial government buildings in the city centre that were problematic but that almost all buildings accommodating government departments in Gauteng were in various stages of dilapidation and needed urgent attention.

The PSA, however, expressed disappointment with some Heads of Department who did not comply with the GPG directive to evacuate the buildings. "This is a step back from the progress that stakeholders are trying to make to ensure employees' safety. Departments that did not comply include Community Safety, Economic Development, as well as Agriculture. The PSA has written to the GPG, requesting the MEC to enforce the directive on these departments. The PSA will consider legal steps against these non-compliant departments should they fail to observe the instruction as agreed between labour and the GPG," said Ms Venter.

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