

Occupational health and safety: Verulam Family Court

The PSA is extremely concerned and outraged by appalling and hazardous working conditions at the Verulam Family Court, which is attached to the Verulam Magistrate's Court. The conditions are extremely unsatisfactory, constitute a flagrant violation of occupational health and safety (OHS) prescripts and represent a serious indictment on the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development's constitutional obligation to provide a safe, dignified, and humane workplace. Following urgent complaints from members, the PSA conducted oversight walkabouts and what was discovered is shocking.

Extreme heat and non-functioning cooling systems

Employees are working under unbearably hot conditions owing to non-functioning air-conditioners. A member was drenched in perspiration and was forced to purchase a new shirt during working hours. These conditions are inhumane and unacceptable.

Hazardous and unhygienic ablution facilities

Ablution facilities are in a disgraceful state. Toilets are broken and, in some instances, supported by bricks. Toilets do not flush. Female employees are forced to share ablution facilities with male colleagues. Male toilets on the second floor are not functioning, and employees are left without adequate facilities. Members of the public have access to only two male and two female toilets, which are grossly insufficient and frequently out of order. The PSA is aware of a distressing incident where a member of the public soiled himself owing to the lack of functional ablution facilities and had to return home to change. This directly violates the dignity of court users and employees. Female members have reported contracting infections linked to the unhygienic conditions. Some employees have resorted to avoiding the use of workplace toilets entirely, choosing instead to wait until they return home. This poses serious health risks and long-term medical complications.

Overcrowding and undignified working conditions

Offices are overcrowded and some employees are reportedly forced to operate from spaces adjacent to or within toilet areas to perform their duties. This is unacceptable in any institution, let alone a court of law.

Broken promises

Following the condemnation of a significant portion of the main Verulam Magistrate's Court by the Department of Employment and Labour, which resulted in contravention notices being issued, the management assured employees that overcrowding would be temporary and that additional ablution facilities would be connected to balance the load. These promises remain unfulfilled.

PSA demands

- Immediate intervention of the Provincial Head of Justice, with a comprehensive occupational health and safety inspection and full disclosure of findings. A clear turnaround plan is required with timeframes to address overcrowding and infrastructure failures.
- Urgent repair and restoration of all ablution facilities, mitigating the current compelling conditions.
- Immediate restoration of functional cooling systems.

The PSA will not stand by whilst members are subjected to degrading, unsafe, and unconstitutional working conditions. Courts are institutions of justice and cannot operate in conditions that undermine human dignity and employee wellbeing. The failure by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development to act will leave the PSA with no alternative but to escalate the matter through formal OHS enforcement channels and other lawful avenues available to protect members and the public.

Join the Union of Choice

Employees who wish to join a Union that actively protects members' rights, advocates for fair and equitable medical-aid practices, and prioritises members' health interests are encouraged to take this opportunity to become part of the PSA.

Reuben Maleka
GENERAL MANAGER