

## **Minister Nxesi calls for safety of employees to be a priority**

**DURBAN:** Public Works Minister TW Nxesi says it is unacceptable that two construction workers die every week in South Africa. Speaking at the Construction Health and Safety Seminar held in Umhlanga, north of Durban, minister Nxesi said it was however comforting that the number of fatal accidents per year have fallen from 93 in 2013 to 36 in 2016.

The Minister said the fatalities reported are only the tip of the iceberg. “In 2016 there were 272 permanent disabilities as a result of accidents on construction sites. The reality and seriousness of Health and Safety was brought home to me last month, in this very city (Durban) in a facility which falls under Public Works. Many of you will have read of the tragedy which occurred in the Salisbury Island Naval base resulting in 6 fatalities. It was not a huge construction project. It involved repairs to a sewage pump station. Unbeknown to the contractor, septic conditions had developed in the tank leading to a lethal build-up of poisonous gases – particularly methane – which has no colour and no smell. The three workers working on the pump died of poisoning. Defence force members (naval ratings) went to their assistance. Three of these heroes also died of poisoning,” explained Minister Nxesi.

The Minister said the scale of the human tragedy that occurred was brought home to him when he visited the families of the three workers in the days that followed – husbands, sons, fathers, breadwinners cruelly snatched from their families.

“But it was also a massive wake-up call. Aging infrastructure much of it out of sight, underground – represents a very clear and imminent risk,” said the Minister.

Minister Nxesi assured delegates to the seminar that his Department’s immediate priority is to make safe the sewage

treatment plants and have compliant Health and Safety Policies in place.

“As Public Works, we will now be comprehensively reviewing our Health and Safety strategy and procedures,” the Minister said.