

# Heroic rescue bid took heavy toll

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IGNORANT of the lurking and deadly danger, three seamen paid with their lives for promptly responding to a distress call from labourers working on the Durban naval base on Friday.

Leaking methane gas from a sewer pump pit in an unused area at the base overwhelmed the seamen, with the three workers they tried to save.

At a time when servicemen and women are to receive special recognition at the Armed Forces Day in Durban on Tuesday, the families of Leading Seaman Amrithlall Ramdin, 41, Able Seaman Francois William Mundell, 26, and Seaman Henro

Ter Borg, 21, will be mourning their deaths.

On social media, the men were lauded as heroes and prayers were said for their families.

The trio swung into action when they heard desperate pleas from the workers in the pit.

At the time of going to print, the Department of Public Works had not released the names of the dead workers, but the Sunday Tribune established that Phelelane Zondi and Warren Williams were among the dead. The three were contracted by the department to repair a sewer storage pump.

A witness said the men's bodies were found on top of each other. "The workers

weren't fitted with any breathing apparatuses, nor safety gear, and there was no signage outside the pumphouse to indicate the presence of hazardous chemicals," the witness said.

The department is responsible for maintaining facilities at the naval base and had appointed contractor Kwayando Investments to conduct the repair operation.

The workmen were reinstalling a pump the company had repaired when they began to experience difficulty breathing and screamed for help.

Ramdin, William and Mundell rushed to their aid. There was further commotion as other naval officers arrived at

the scene. It has been reported that 26 navy personnel needed medical treatment after their efforts to reach the bodies.

Thamsanqua Mchunu, a department spokesperson, said: "There was no need for protective equipment, gear or signage because there was no expectation of toxic gases, as the service provider said there were no such problems previously."

In a press statement, Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi said the affected government departments would work together to determine the cause of the loss of life.

"I would like to express our sincere condolences to families of the departed."