

Public Works to pay engineer R7.3m

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The public works minister has been ordered to pay more than R7.3 million damages to a young engineer who was nearly killed when he fell through the roof of the Sophia Town police station seven years ago.

In terms of a settlement reached in the High Court in Pretoria this week, public works agreed to pay almost R6.3 million damages to Plettenberg Bay engineer Bernard Holm, 27, for his past and future loss of earnings.

This was apart from almost R1 million already paid in respect of his medical and related expenses.

Holm was 20 years old and busy with his mechatronic engineering degree at the Stellenbosch University in 2010, when he worked on the roof of the station as part of practical experience with an engineering firm.

While measuring, he stepped onto a fiberglass sheet covering a ventilation shaft and fell almost 18 metres down the shaft.

He could not recall the incident at all and only started coming out of an induced coma 10 days later. He was thereafter hospitalised for a total of three months and spent another six months recuperating at home.

He sustained numerous serious injuries in the fall, including a skull fracture and brain injury resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder, a fractured spine, pelvis and leg, a dislocated left shoulder, numerous facial fractures, broken teeth and a ruptured spleen.

He had to undergo numerous drastic operations and was left with a shortened left leg, severe back pain, a loss of mobility in his shoulder, extensive scarring, an asymmetrical appearance of his face and loss of hearing in one ear.

He alleged in court papers Public Works had been negligent by not properly covering the ventilation shaft and not warning him about the known dangerous conditions on the roof.

Although he completed his studies, he still required extensive further surgery, treatment and therapy and was, according to experts, a more vulnerable individual whose injuries might impact on his employment potential capacity in future.