

State land being stolen, dept finds

SCAMS involving the illegal transfer of state properties have been uncovered by the Department of Public Works in KwaZulu-Natal.

The red flag was raised by eThekweni Municipality, which found that certain provincial state properties appear to have been transferred without legitimate rates clearance certificates.

KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Human Settlements and Public Works Ravi Pillay said in a statement yesterday: "An internal preliminary investigation found that the majority of the transfers took place in February/March 2017, and one in November 2015. The values of the sales vary from R300 000 to R24.8 million and involve only vacant land ranging in size from 1 162 square metres to 2,9 hectares."

Public Works has instructed the state attorney to appoint senior counsel to bring an urgent application to interdict all the current title holders from further disposing of the properties. The Deeds Office has been informed of the discovery of the transfers and advised to confirm authenticity of the transfer of any state provincial land with the department, before passing the transfer.

"The KZN Law Society was also notified of the fraudulent transfers and [was] requested to advise all attorneys in the province to only accept authorising documents containing the names of the department's duly authorised representatives. Attorneys are also required to confirm the authenticity of state provincial properties transferred in the last two years," said Pillay.

"We are going after the culprits with all the resources at our disposal. These properties are national assets and such theft is viewed in very serious light." He said the department is laying criminal charges with the Hawks and the Commercial Crimes Unit against the fraudulent parties. — BE.