

Blame game as metro cuts electricity supply to public works

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THE Nelson Mandela Bay offices of the Eastern Cape Department of Public Works were plunged into darkness yesterday, with the department and the municipality each blaming the other.

Unresolved issues over electricity bills resulted in power to the department's offices in the metro being cut, forcing officials to leave work early.

Public Works spokesman Mpumzi Zuzile attributed the problem to incorrect billing, saying: "Some of the properties [the municipality refers] to, do not belong to public works.

"They belong to other departments like agriculture or social development."

While those departments were responsible for their own electricity bills, he said, the metro kept on billing public works.

"Our own debt is only R6-million, which is broken down into R3-million a month.

"It has not been paid because we are awaiting outstanding documentation from the metro.

"We are also verifying properties that do not belong to Public Works, for which we are being billed," Zuzile said.

Saying that a meeting between public works officials and the metro had been scheduled for today, Zuzile said: "It is very unfair for the department not to have received notice before the electricity was cut off."

But the metro hit back, saying cutting off the electricity supply was a last resort after all attempts to recover the money that was owed had failed.

Spokesman Mthubanzi Mniki said the metro expected everyone to pay for services consistently, without fail.

"Government departments must take a lead in payment of rates and be an example to the broader population of the city," he said.

"An exception is only made to indigent

individuals, to whom the municipality allocates free water and electricity.

"For the municipality to continue servicing all the residents, including the poorest of the poor, everyone who can pay, must pay."

He said the metro had notified public works in February about its intention to disconnect electricity if the department did not pay its arrears, but since then it had constantly received insufficient payment.