

State under fire for still using hazardous KWT building six years on

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THE Eastern Cape social development department is under fire for its continued use of office space that was long ago declared a health and safety hazard to staff, even life-threatening.

The Bhisho portfolio committee on social development found that the situation persisted even though the department was warned six years ago.

In a report presented last Wednesday, the committee expressed shock that the department continued to utilise the Beacon Hill building in Schornville in King William's Town as its provincial offices despite the damning findings against the structure in 2012.

The committee has demanded the department submit a detailed report by June 10, of how it is handling the matter.

The Beacon Hill building received two damning health and safety inspection reports in January 2012: one from the National Occupational Safety Association (Nosa) and the other from Buffalo City Metro's (BCM) health and public safety directorate.

BCM's finding six years ago was scathing.

It found that prolonged exposure to high temperatures in the building could lead to fatal heat strokes.

Nosa's report, released at the same time as the BCM findings, stated that out of the 225 work stations, only 94 were compliant with the minimum illumination

standards.

"The placement of desks in relation to the location of the light units is the biggest area of concern. This condition places continual strain on the employee's eyes and may result in premature deterioration of sight," said the Nosa report.

Social development spokesman Mzukisi Solani had not responded to e-mailed questions at the time of writing yesterday.

Otis Tshabalala, chief operating officer for the building's owners, Delta Property Fund, a JSE-listed company, said: "We have been aware of the allegations made in 2012.

"Delta again rejects any allegations in this regard and wish to reiterate its ongoing commitment to the quality of its assets and the health, safety and comfort of its tenants.

"Since taking ownership in November 2012, Delta has consistently addressed any and all tenant concerns at the specific property and even established a standby team to immediately respond to business critical matters such as air-conditioning repairs on an ongoing basis.

"In addition, a total of R40-million was earmarked some time ago for extensive refurbishments to the building. We can confirm that tenant sign-off has now been obtained to implement these upgrades, which will commence very shortly.

"We remain committed to keep on working closely with our tenants and will continue to address their concerns during the up-

grading phase.

"Delta is not in a position to comment on the BCM report referred to, as we haven't had sight of this document. We can confirm that an emergency repair response team is on standby to prioritise any air-conditioning related queries.

"Our R40-million upgrade to the building includes a completely new, state of the art, air-conditioning facility that is not only power efficient, but will ensure tenant concerns over temperature fluctuations in the building is permanently addressed."

Solani yesterday blamed the public works department.

He said in a written reply: "The reports from Nosa and the Department of Labour were submitted to the department of roads and public works.

"The first draft of the proposed renovation plan was presented to the department on March 6 2018. The awarded contractor of the landlord of Beacon Hill office complex visited on April 25 to plan the site establishment.

"The final project plan of renovations was expected on May 7 2018. The project plan is now expected on May 16 2018."

Among other critical findings of the portfolio committee are: The budget for the department's provincial office has increased by 27.6% or R22.6-million due to the centralisation of contractual obligations to the province.

Portfolio committee chairman Christian Martin could not be reached for comment yesterday. — zingisam@dispatch.co.za