

■ DEATH TRAP



STAFF at the Department of Health in the CBD refused to enter the building, saying it was unsafe and unsuitable for humans to work in. | **BONGANI SHILUBANE**/African News Agency (ANA)

*Employees continue to protest, refusing to put up with dangerous work environment*

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WORKERS at the national Department of Health in Pretoria will ask the court to declare their building unsafe to work in.

This came to light yesterday while across the Jukskei in Joburg, buildings near the burning provincial Health Department were being evacuated for safety reasons.

The Public Servants Association (PSA) will, on September 21, turn to the Labour Court in Joburg to ask that Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and the departments of Health and Public Works be forced to move workers to a safer working environment.

They also want the minister and

the departments interdicted from disciplining members who refuse to enter the Civitas building in the city due to the safety risk it poses.

The Department of Health has turned to the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria, to urgently interdict protesting workers from intimidating others who want to enter the building. It also wants workers interdicted from disrupting work at the office.

The matter was removed from the roll after the PSA and National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union undertook to see to it that their members desisted from unlawful conduct. Counsel for both unions said they did not condone unruly behaviour.

The assistant general manager of the PSA, Reuben Maleka, said outside

court that the Civitas building was “sick” and not a place where workers should be housed. “It is a death trap, a mine shaft,” he told the Pretoria News.

In papers filed before the Labour Court, he stated that, according to a health safety assessment of the building issued in February last year, the building was a health risk. Some employees were working in an area with insufficient ventilation and it was proposed that measures be implemented to address these issues.

Maleka said workers complained of respiratory sickness, shortness of breath and burning eyes. They were told by their doctor that it was due to their working environment.

Maleka said that as a result of these conditions, many members

had exhausted their medical aid and sick leave. Several letters were sent to the department to complain about the conditions, but no response was received.

In March the director-general of the Health Department undertook to bring in Public Works to repair the building, but nothing has been done.

Maleka said the issue was urgent as the departments had taken no action, despite it being clear that the building was a health and safety hazard.

Yesterday Maleka said the building was such a death trap that they feared what had happened in Johannesburg could, at any time, happen here.

Staff continued to protest yesterday, refusing to enter the building as they have for the past three months.