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FS Labour workers evacuate faulty Bfn office building

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Workers at the Department of Labour's Provincial Office in Bloemfontein were evacuated from the building last week Tuesday owing to health and safety hazards which posed serious fire and electrocution threats at the building.

These hazards include the sporadic exploding of light fittings, faulty lifts as well as a leaking roof. This was revealed by the department's provincial communications officer, Josial Ramokoena, who told *OFM News* that the department's OHS inspectors found that the building did not comply with the regulations outlined in the Electrical Installation Regulations.

Ramokoena said that OHS inspectors first realised last year that there were a number of issues with the building, particularly with reference to the wiring, faulty lifts as well as a leaking roof, among other problems. He said the building's landlord was then engaged by the Department of Public Works on a number of occasions, requesting him to attend to these issues related to non-compliance.

Ramokoena said it was only after these issues were not fixed that the department then took it upon itself to evacuate its employees either until the OHS issues at the building are resolved or until the Department finds its workers another building to work from. In the meantime, some of the officials will be accommodated at the Department of Public Works as well as the Labour Centre in Bloemfontein.

Ramokoena could not give an estimate time frame that the department hopes to have its issues resolved by. He also added that the department is at the moment focusing on ensuring that service delivery is not compromised

on during this period and whether or not the department will return to the building will depend on how soon the landlord can fix the risks found at the building.

The Department of Labour has issued a Prohibition Notice against the landlord who owns the building that accommodates the departmental officials. This Prohibition Notice will be valid for the next 90 days. It is expected of the landlord to have fixed all of the non-compliant areas that were identified within 90 days and then our health and safety health inspectors will go back after 90 days to check.

Ramokoena said while this was a health and safety issue, it could not at all be compared to the Johannesburg fire situation earlier this month where a few firefighters died trying to extinguish flames at the Gauteng Department of Health Building, which allegedly had faulty wiring, among other problems. "The two cannot be compared because we issued notices on non-compliance last year already when we first picked up issues in the building and we also have inspections on a daily basis to avoid a situation such as that one," Ramokoena said.

Meanwhile, Nomfundo Douw-Jack, Head of the Labour Department in the Free State, urged the clients of the department to exercise patience and be considerate of the situation as the department tries to find the best solution to this setback.

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