

A ticking time bomb

The Davis Alexander Building is a 'disaster waiting to happen' — staff

KERUSHUN PILLAY

STAFF at the Davis Alexander Building are suffering unhygienic and “unsafe” working conditions, and fear it’s a “disaster” waiting to happen.

The high-rise building in Church Street houses several police units, including crime intelligence and the accident unit, as well as Department of Education employees.

Among the problems, staff said, are the air conditioners at the building that have not worked for about two years.

Rubbish has also piled up in various places causing a rodent and cockroach infestation; only one lift works; the toilet units are without detergent; and there is no functioning fire alarm or equipment to deal with fires.

The building is stuffy and hot due to the lack of air conditioning and ventilation and the fact that the windows are sealed.

Some water pipes are completely rusted, and staff complain that the water has a “metallic” taste, and is sometimes brown in colour.

Rubbish is piled up at several spots, including in unused toilet cubicles.

Staff told *The Witness* that they have tried to raise the various issues with their employers as well as the Depart-

ment of Public Works (DPW), but have had no joy. They claim the DPW appointed a contractor to fix the air conditioning in March, but repairs have still not been done.

A staffer said: “People literally bake in here on hot days. No air circulates in here and even on a cold day it can be unbearable. We suffer with headaches, nausea, and when a person gets sick it spreads like wildfire.”

Staff members said they have tried several times to escalate the matter to their superiors, but nothing has yet come of it.

They have also sent petitions, detailing their concerns, to their employers.

“People do important work here like crime intelligence and education matters. It is tough to work in these conditions. As early as 10 am we struggle to

concentrate because there’s just no air here.

“It can reach as high as 32 degrees in the office during the day. After two or three hot days, the office will be as high as 30 degrees in the morning.”

Staff now fear a disaster in the building, similar to the recent incident where an electrical fault allegedly led to a fire at a Johannesburg building occupied by government employees.

“We get the feeling that someone has to die before something is done about this building.”

The DPW in KwaZulu-Natal referred *The Witness* to the national department, which did not respond to a query sent last week.

The provincial SAPS did not respond to a query.

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The city is falling apart. This week, ‘The Witness’ is focusing on various aspects of decay and neglect, including historic buildings, administrative nerve-centres, as well as the never-ending saga of potholes, among others. Today: the high-rise Davis Alexander Building, which houses several police units.



ABOVE: A rusted water pipe at the Davis Alexander Building.
LEFT: Garbage piles up in a disused toilet cubicle in the Davis Alexander Building.
PHOTOS: KERUSHUN PILLAY