

PMB VIP Unit's offices are in 'appalling' state

KERUSHUN PILLAY

STAFF at the police's VIP Unit offices in Pietermaritzburg are suffering frequent electricity and water outages at their headquarters, which also has a rat infestation.

The team occupies one floor in a building on Langalibalele Street, which is otherwise abandoned.

Staff complained that the unit, made up of 192 officers, is forced to use a small office space. Officers in this unit guard VIPs in Pietermaritzburg, like delegates and ministers, and guard the legislature and the Premier's Office.

The office space is cramped, and staff have taken to sticking newspaper pages over windows because blinds are broken. Exposed wires dangle from walls, and there are several stains on the carpet.

Water can be seen seeping from the ceiling, and wallpaper and paint is peeling from the walls.

Staff have to use the emergency fire escape stairwell as a kitchen space, since there are no other available rooms.

They say the air conditioning does not work, and that carpets should have been replaced after a flood three years ago. "It is also not safe here," said one person. "We've been broken into and had items stolen, and one door that was broken during a robbery in 2014 still hasn't been fixed."

"We have sent dozens of letters to our superiors since 2008. They [management] say they're looking for new accommodation, but we've been here for so long and nothing has happened."

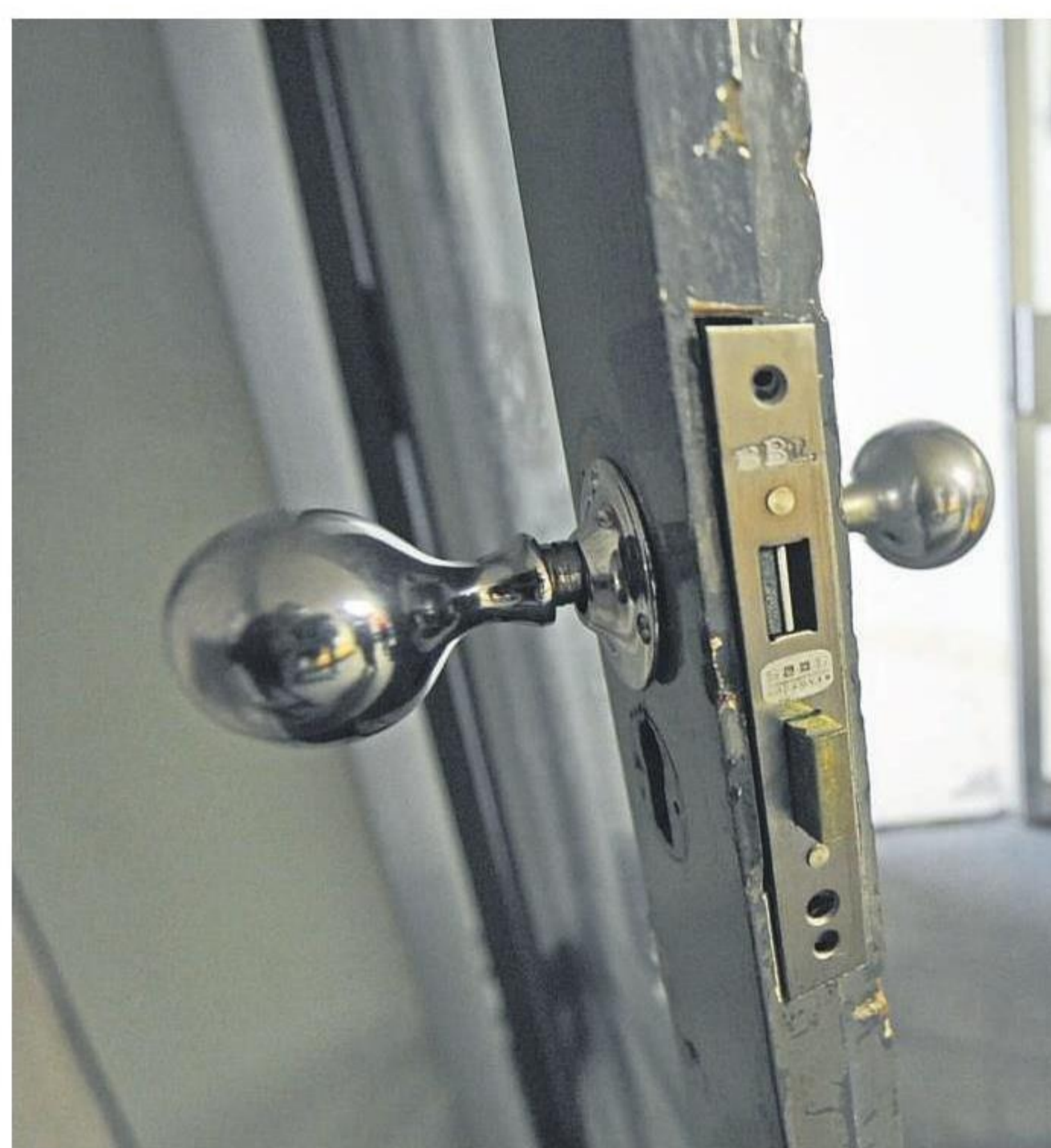
Staff said rats could be seen in the parking lot where refuse is dumped, and they can be seen scurrying around the fire escape stairwell. "We have to get this place fumigated every three months," one source said.

The Department of Public Works said it met with the building's owner last week and an undertaking was made to address complaints within a month.

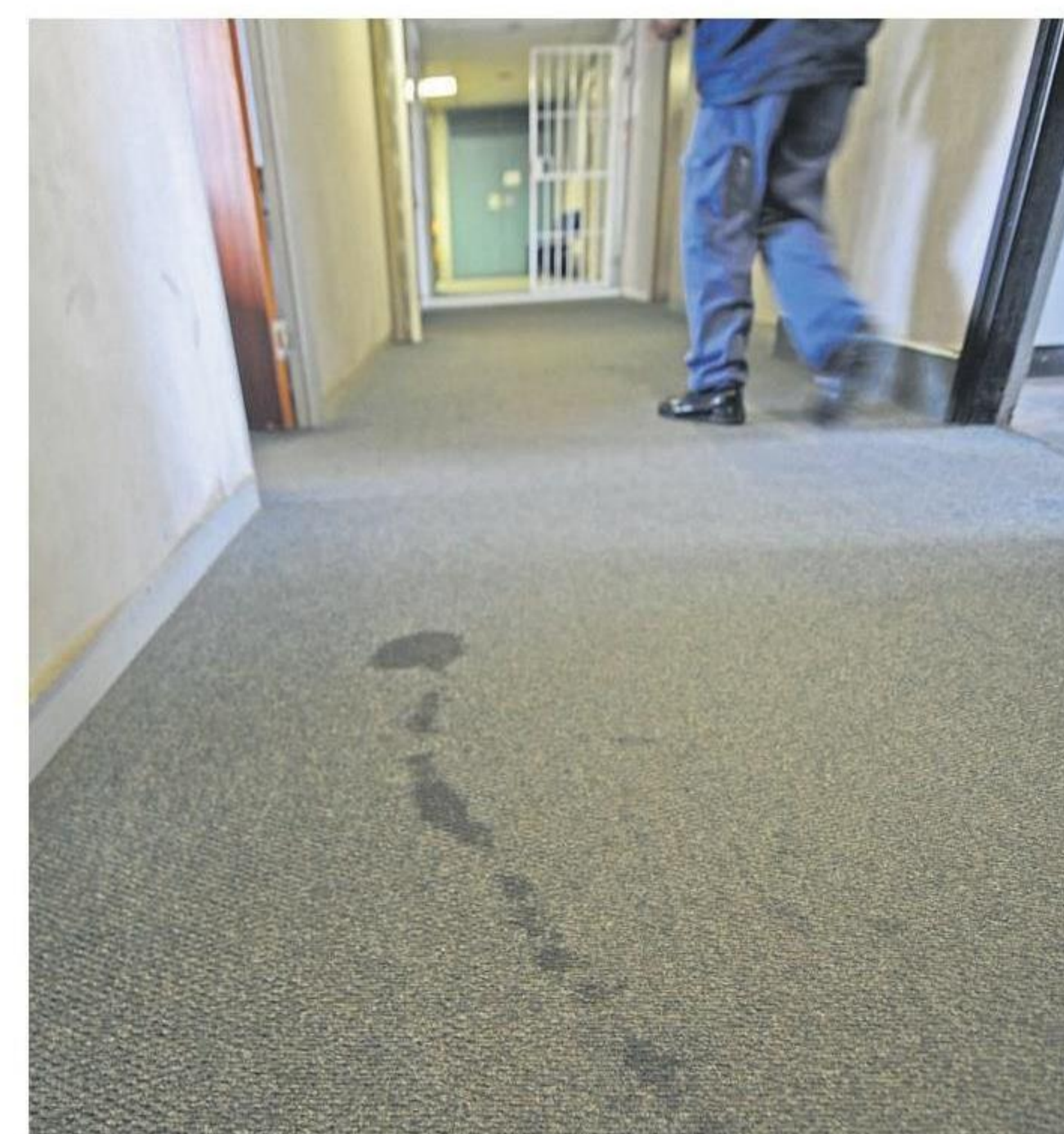
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The VIP Unit is stationed at the Main City Building on Langalibalele Street.
PHOTOS: IAN CARBUTT



A door handle broken during a break-in in 2014 remains broken.



Carpets are stained.