

■ CIVITAS BUILDING

Unsafe Health HQ ordered shut

Workers rejoice as inspector issues prohibition order against unsafe offices

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THE national Health Department yesterday shut down its Civitas building headquarters after it had been slapped with a prohibition order from occupational health inspectors.

Protesting workers burst into celebration when the order was issued months after they complained of the unsafe condition of the building.

The Department of Labour began inspecting the controversial building after staff protested, following the deaths of three firefighters at the Bank of Lisbon building in Joburg.

At the time, union-led workers were expressing frustration with the building's poor safety conditions and refused to enter it until improvements had been done.

Workers felt victorious yesterday when department director-general Dr Precious Matsoso issued the signed letter stating the department's decision to fully comply with the prohibition order effective immediately.

Matsoso informed workers that the department had received the directional notice from an inspector who expressed an opinion in term of Section 30 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The inspector found that allowing workers to occupy the Civitas building was or could threaten their health and safety owing to lack of structural repairs, a non-functional sprinkler system and problematic aid-conditioning.

However, department spokesperson Popo Maja said although they were fully adhering to the prohibition notice, they would appeal against it.

"Our understanding is that it was taken in a meeting without practical assessment of work that has been done by the Department of Public Works.

"We have appealed so that the Department of Labour sends a team rather than an individual for a comprehensive assessment and on the basis of that issues a notice," he said.

Leaders of the Public Servants Association and National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union at the department Peter Moloi and Bhungani Mzolo expressed their satisfaction with the decision after the intervention of the Department of Labour.

They said workers could finally be



WORKERS at the Department of Health headquarters celebrate yesterday after the building was closed for safety reasons. | JAMES MAHLOKWANE

at home and in peace knowing that their employer had no choice but to start serious and urgent repairs to the problematic building.

"Right now we are happy that workers are going inside the building to fetch their belongings and reschedule their appointments before they leave.

"We want our people to work, but that must be done in a fashion that does not compromise their health and safety," said Moloi.

Cosatu spokesperson Sizwe Pamla said the federation welcomed the prohibition notice and supported the Department of Labour's decision.

"This again exposes the cavalier attitude of the Department of Health and government in general because

BILLIONS SPENT BUT PROBLEMS PERSIST

- ◆ The building was renovated several years ago, but still had problems billions of rand later.
- ◆ Unions wanted the department to vacate the building until all repairs had been done, but a suitable temporary office could not be found.
- ◆ Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi expressed on numerous occasions that he agreed with labour that their complaints were legitimate.
- ◆ Following the deadly fire at another government office building in Johannesburg, an arson attempt was acknowledged at the Civitas building and reported to the police.
- ◆ The building houses more than 1 000 workers, and vacating it was never going to be an easy process.
- ◆ In April protesting workers staged the first total shutdown of the building in protest at its condition.

workers have been raising this matter for a long time.

"What makes things even worse is that the same people who are sup-

posed to be trusted with the healthcare of the nation cannot even guarantee the health of their officials in their head office," he said.