

# Department says it won't be going back to 'death trap'

**An agreement has now been reached between the health ministry and employees to vacate the Civitas building.**

## Reitumetse Mahope

Following months of a stand-off between the department of health and its employees over the status of the Civitas headquarters building, the government has finally decided to permanently ditch the offices.

"The intention is not to come back," said health department spokesperson Popo Maja.

"It all, however, depends on the public works department to find us accommodation."

Staff working in the building have been complaining about lack of safety and concerns for the health of the employees, even though the government previously declared the building "safe" for use.

An agreement has now been reached between the health ministry and its employees to vacate the building in the Pretoria CBD.

Civitas, which has been described as "a very high tech building", has been at the centre of a continuous stand-off between labour unions, the departments of labour, health and of public works.

"It would be in the interest of everybody for the department of health to relocate



Health department employees protesting at the Civitas building in the CDB.

elsewhere and leave the Civitas building," said Maja this week.

Maja said although the department tried to prove the building was still safe to work in by bringing engineers and other technical

experts from various institutions to inspect it, the feud continued between employees and employers.

"Numerous meetings have taken place between organised employees, department

of labour, health and public works," he said.

He said the decision to ditch the building was reached after a meeting held last week Wednesday in Cape Town.

"It was agreed that all the parties will abandon all the technical or legal arguments they may be having against each other pertaining to the building," said Maja.

"Instead they will concentrate on the common goal for all, to relocate from the building.

"This will bring an end to the mistrust, suspicions and a psychologically poisoned working environment, whereby working relationships are highly strained.

"This stand-off is in no one's interest.

"Actually, it is working against the interest of the people of South Africa.

"Neither the labour unions nor the government departments have anything to gain from this continued state of affairs."

Maja said a task team has been formed to identify where the department of health will relocate to; develop a timetable for the relocation; identify and recommend a transitional mechanism; and resolve any other issues pertaining to the stand-off and the relocation.