

# Legal eagle takes beating from the heat

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HIGH temperatures caused by non-functioning air-conditioners in the Gauteng High Court, Pretoria have reached such a boiling point that an advocate collapsed from the heat on Tuesday.

Karen Strydom said she was in court 2C for the calling of the roll, where like in the other courtrooms, the heat was unbearable as usual.

"I turned around to walk out and collapsed. I can only remember walking out one moment and the next I was being woken up by my colleague."

Strydom said the heat had been unbearable since the end of last year.

"This courtroom has about 150 advocates and lawyers at a time inside it. There are about 120 Road Accident Fund claims alone on the roll. This excludes the public and other role-players in court."

Strydom said things had reached such proportions that she and her colleagues advised their clients not to attend these proceedings. She said many of them suffer from an array of medical ailments for which they instituted claims. Judge Joseph Raulinga, who calls the roll in the mornings, as well as several other judges, allowed the legal eagles to down their gowns due to the heat. Strydom said she did not feel comfortable in just appearing in her shirt, so she opted to also wear her jacket, but without her gown.

"I feel it is disrespectful, but we don't have a choice."

The only airflow into the court building are two small windows in the

passage, which are about 80m apart. The courtrooms only rely on air conditioners.

After Strydom collapsed, Judge Raulinga remarked that if the air conditioning did not work at Parliament or in the office of a minister, it was immediately repaired. It, however, seemed to be a different story at court.

Several advocates as well as court staff said it was near impossible for them to do their work in the heat.

One said he did not only dread the heat, but feared the unhealthy situation of the dirty air. Sweating and red-faced advocates have become the norm.

Chairman of the Pretoria Society of Advocates Francois Botes SC has written to the Office of the Chief Justice to complain.

Botes, an acting judge, said the air conditioning had been completely dysfunctional since last year. He stated that it seemed as if the relevant parties were unable to resolve the issue.

The Department of Public Works, he said, was either not prepared to address the issue or simply ignorant.

"It cannot be expected of judges, court personnel, legal practitioners and the public to be subjected to the current state of affairs." Botes asked Justice and Correctional Services Minister Justice Masutha and Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng to urgently intervene.

"It seems that the powers that be are not living up to expectation by addressing this problem. It is apparent that either the Department of Justice or Public Works is kicking the can down the road and labours under the misapprehension that the problem will resolve

itself or that it will disappear like mist before the sun," Botes said in the letter. He added that the situation was critical as justice could not be dispensed under these circumstances.

Spokesperson for the Office of the Chief Justice Nathi Mncube said: "It is true that the air conditioning has been

a challenge."

He said it was restored in courtrooms on the second floor last week, but the contractor was still on-site and struggling to repair air handling units that supply cool air on the fourth, sixth and eighth floors. The second floor, however, is where Strydom collapsed.

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