

Officials tear down houses

Devastated families in tears after BCM moves in on land invaders at airport

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Scores of East London families were left homeless on Friday when Buffalo City Metro executed a dramatic demolition court order, flattening about 20 newly-built brickhouses at Farm 924 near East London Airport.

The move left many homeowners in tears. Residents told the Dispatch they had paid up to R6,000 to a man named Dlamini to secure a one-room structure and many of them had built extensions to their houses.

Some residents said Friday's demolitions came after they experienced vandalism of their homes on Thursday. They blamed these acts of vandalism on a group of residents from the Ntenti area, who were opposed to the community living on the farm. Dlamini's house was vandalised on Thursday, leaving his family homeless, but he declined to talk to the Dispatch.

His wife, who did not want to be identified, said: "These people are fighting us. They say we are not from this area and that we are from the Transkei. They destroyed our home and took away everything including food, clothes and dishes. As I am standing here, I have absolutely nothing. Yesterday we slept in the car in town because we had nowhere to go and it was not safe to come here."

BCM spokesperson Samkelo Ngwenya said Friday's demolitions went ahead under the auspices of the metro, the sheriff of the court and the SAPS. He said the piece of land being targeted was adjacent to the airport.



WHY ME?: Zameka Gxogxa had her house on Farm 924 demolished on orders of BCM officials who arrived with a sheriff and members of the SA Police Service in tow on Friday. Pictures: SIBONGILE NGALWA

The land was owned by BCM, provincial public works and a private owner.

"We got a court order and we had followed the law in terms of warning people and, as such, we are now executing an eviction order which grants us permission to demolish those structures.

"We are sending a strong warning to all those who are building structures illegally that the city has a zero-tolerance approach and we are not going to entertain such actions. We are also calling on communities to be responsible and not allow such."

Ngwenya said even private property own-

ers were invading the metro's land and threatened that the metro would be pursuing this invasion.

"It becomes important for people to know that there is a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that our airport is expanded.

"The city has more than 100 informal settlements and a huge housing backlog and we need to work together to ensure that we manage the situation and people are accommodated legally and within the ambit of the law so that services can be rendered," said Ngwenya.

Distraught homeowner Zameka Gxogxa



DESERTED; The shell of a demolished house at Farm 924 on Friday.



NO MERCY: Homes close to the East London airport are demolished. Picture: SUPPLIED

said she had paid Dlamini R5,000 for the site on which her home had been built.

"I am in so much pain because I was trying to secure a home for my children.

"This one room was already finished with windows and everything but the municipality just demolished it," said Gxogxa.

People seen looting zinc sheets, timbers and fencing wire threatened the Dispatch team and ordered that photographs of their actions be deleted.

BCM mayor Xola Pakati said the home demolitions were "unfortunate" however metro bosses were left with "no choice".