



Photo: Wikipedia

Air base sinkholes are no threat to residents

The process of rehabilitating the sinkholes is in various stages and some holes are still being investigated.

Noxolo Sibiyi

Residents nearby have been reassured that the sinkholes affecting the Waterkloof air force base in the east of Pretoria will not affect them.

The national key point used by President Cyril Ramaphosa and other government ministers, has been facing sinkhole problems for years and has a high-risk classification due to dolomitic soil conditions.

Several buildings on the 640ha base have been demolished because of ground movement brought on by water ingress.

Parliamentary spokesperson Faith Ndenze said there was no material evidence that residents would be affected.

“At this stage, it would be irresponsible to speculate,” she said.

A parliamentary committee received no material evidence that the sinkholes on the base may affect nearby residents, who are concerned that they might lose their properties because of the sinkholes.

“The committee would urge that there is no material evidence for speculation in this regard,” Ndenze said.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) has appointed the Independent Development Trust (IDT) to maintain and rehabilitate the sinkholes and dolomite at the base.

Ndenze said the process of rehabilitating the sinkholes is in various stages and some holes are still being investigated.

“It must be kept in mind that sinkholes caused by dolomite substrata are very sensitive,” she said.

“The rehabilitation process is very expensive.

“To ensure that the correct processes are followed, the investigation stages are crucial to ensure successful

rehabilitation.”

The base has a number of sinkholes and Ndenze said not all can be dealt with at the same time due to limited financial resources and skilled staff.

Some holes have been rehabilitated successfully.

“Dolomite substrata are part of the geographical structure of the region,” she said.

“To ensure that the correct processes are followed, the investigation stages are crucial to ensure successful rehabilitation.”

She said that as part of this oversight function, the committee requested regular updates on progress from the DPWI.

Public works and infrastructure committee chairperson Nolitha Ntobongwana cautioned that the government could not have a national key point used by the president and ministers declared as a high-risk area because of the development of sinkholes.

She called on all stakeholders to work together to ensure that the base was safe for usage by members of the executive.

Ntobongwana has since asked the South African Air Force, the Independent Development Trust (IDT) and other appointed service providers to ensure that the sinkholes were not impacting the functionality, effectiveness and safety of the base.

The contractor was expected to report, among other things, on progress made in relation to construction and/or replacement of water, sewer and storm water pipes, the upgrading of dolomite non-compliant internal building wet services and the demolishing of identified buildings abandoned due to ground movement evident by sinkhole formation on the base to name a few.

The contract is expected to last for 36 months and the base is said to be safe for use.

Ndenze said the base was constantly being monitored for the development of sinkholes.



President Cyril Ramaphosa.
Photo: Lunga Mzangwe