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MK VETERANS

Asbestos houses a health risk - DA

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DEPARTMENT of Public Works authorities in Mpumalanga have failed to refute allegations that it planned to donate 100 asbestos houses to Umkhonto weSizwe military veterans.

These veterans make up thousands of soldiers who returned to South Africa in 1991, hoping they would be rewarded for their efforts.

In 2017, the Mpumalanga government began a programme of building "decent" houses for the veterans.

The programme was expected to start in 2014, but was delayed by bad planning. So far, a few hundred houses have been handed over, benefiting veterans who had spent over two decades shacking up with relatives and in-laws.

This week, DA councillor in the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality in Middelburg, San-Mari Wait, exposed plans for the donation of old asbestos structures that were built more than 40 years ago.

"It has come to the DA's attention that the Mpumalanga Department of Public Works is proposing to donate to military veterans an estimated 100 dilapidated asbestos houses, which pose a health risk to the community.

"We understand that these houses were no longer in a good condition to be occupied by anyone, let alone be used as donations. The DA ran a petition to oppose this. In a previous tribunal hearing, the department failed to submit an environmental impact assessment report in support of these existing asbestos houses," said Wait.

She added that the department had a pending offer to give free land to the Steve Tshwete Municipality, which would have enabled them to build proper houses in line with the provincial government's initial plan.

"The department should have also long removed the asbestos structures and built proper houses.

"In an oversight done by the DA last week, we found that government employees are currently renting those houses, which are not conducive for occupation as they were built with asbestos over 40 years ago."

The councillor said the government had been criticised for attempting to build asbestos structures that posed a health hazard to communities.

"It has been proven and reported many times by several institutions that asbestosis is a lung disease that can occur due to asbestos exposure. Asbestosis occurs after prolonged exposure to asbestos fibres and will happen over a long period of time.

"The DA will initiate a new tribunal hearing urging the department to donate the land to the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality so that the current asbestos structures can be demolished, and proper houses built for the military veterans."