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PROPERTIES ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED

State prepares to seize hijacked buildings

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WIDOWED, unemployed and a single father and grandfather Lukhanyo Madyibi has made the Helen Bowden Nursing Home a sanctuary for his family after he and more than 700 people hijacked the building in Green Point over seven years ago.

Last week, after 77 people perished in a fire in a hijacked building in Johannesburg, reality has struck for Madyibi and many others like him: what will they do and where will they go should an emergency arise?

The building is one of many abandoned across the city. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure said it was undertaking a government-wide investigation into hijacked buildings across the country.

The department is set to identify misappropriated state properties on its register.

Of 29 000 buildings in the department's asset register throughout the country, the department has embarked on a process to recover 1 260 properties that have been flagged as being illegally occupied.

The department will exhaust all means to identify the owners of properties and in cases of buildings where owners have absconded or are not forthcoming, these will be subjected to expropriation by the state in line with the Expropriation Act.

The budget allocation for the 4nursing home stands at R2.8 billion for proposed development such as social housing.

The nursing home was renamed Ahmed Kathrada House by Reclaim the City housing activists during illegal occupation in 2017.

Madyibi became a widow in 2020



SEVEN rooms were gutted by a fire at the old Woodstock Hospital, where more than 1 000 evicted people live. | IAN LANDSBERG African News Agency (ANA)

and shares a two-room flat with his 21-year-old daughter and 5-year-old granddaughter.

"If something should happen here (fire), I do not know what we will do. No-one cares for us, the government does not care, they do not come here," he said.

"Those who are in charge here, they see that there is no vandalism, they control the access to the building.

"We know this building belongs to Public Works and Infrastructure and if we must leave, we will have nowhere to go."

The nursing home is one of many problematic buildings in the Western Cape.

The Old Woodstock Hospital, which has been earmarked for social housing, was renamed Cissie Gool

House by occupants, and has 1 000 occupants. It was damaged by fire earlier this year.

In July, the City's Law Enforcement said they had made progress in fighting the plague of problematic buildings and had 48 new problem buildings declared, an average of 236 active cases were under investigation, and legal proceedings had been instituted against 28 property owners.

Ntobeko Mbingeleli, spokesperson for MEC for Infrastructure Tertuis Simmers, said the building was not a hazard and should a fire break there was access to fire hydrants.

"The department has ensured there is access to potable drinking water through standpipes, and there is a municipal water supply to the five fire hydrants located outside the building,"



THE Helen Bowden Nursing Home building houses more than 800 illegal occupants. | BRENDAN MAGAAR African News Agency (ANA)



LUKHANYI Madyibi, 54, has been living in the Helen Bowden Nursing Home since 2017. | BRENDAN MAGAAR African News Agency (ANA)

she said. "Internal to the building there are numerous fire hose reels, but these cannot be connected to the water supply due to being vandalised.

"Attending to vandalised and sto-

len heads of fire hydrants and attending to leaks of the hydrants due to illegal connections is a regular occurrence.

"It must be noted there is no power to the building, as wiring has been stripped.

"It has been reported that on occasion, when contractors appointed by the department have tried to enter the property to carry out clearing of blocked drains, remove refuse, they have waste and refuse thrown down deliberately by occupants."

Weekend Argus sought to speak with the leadership at the site but they were not present.

Inspector Wayne Dyason, spokesperson for Law Enforcement, said the City's Law Enforcement Problem Building Unit confirmed a fire at a property.