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BUILDING COLLAPSE

Construction sites in Knysna face inspections after George tragedy

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A YEAR after the George building collapse, which claimed the lives of 34 people and left 28 injured, the Department of Employment and Labour continues oversight on construction sites in towns such as Knysna, which saw multiple undocumented foreign nationals taken into custody and the sites closed temporarily.

In a statement, the department confirmed that during a multidisciplinary and unannounced inspection held on June 3, they visited the construction and hospitality sector in Knysna, where several undocumented workers were found.

"At one construction site, gross contravention of labour legislation was discovered, which led to the temporary closure of the site," said the department.

"Multiple undocumented foreign nationals were taken into police custody on site, all thanks to the swift work of the joint venture between the department's Inspection and Enforcement Services (IES) unit, the local Knysna police office, as well as Home Affairs' Border Management Authority."

"The blitz inspection forms part of the department's service delivery campaign in Knysna. #Yazini #Delservices #workersrights."

Teboho Thejane, chief communications officer, said as it was a multidisciplinary blitz, they could not comment formally on undocumented persons, when asked how many persons were detained.

"As the labour migration act is outside our scope we do not effect arrests, but we look at, Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), National Minimum Wage Act (NWMA), Labour Relations Act (LRA), Employment Equity Act (EEA) and Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to mention a few," he said.

"Inspection and Enforcement Services (IES) nationally does have proactive and reaction inspection in different sectors, inclusive of contraction. Construction is one of the sectors under our radar. Because such blitz inspections include other role players, when they are arranged and finalised we will inform accordingly."

In January, the Department of Employment and Labour carried out a similar blitz in Camps Bay where 10 illegal immigrants were found working at restaurants, and their employers held accountable, with one arrested.

The Department of Home Affairs's David Hlabane did not respond to queries.

Just last week, the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, received the final report from the Council for the Built Environment (CBE), through its body Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), surrounding the tragic George building collapse.

He said the department will carefully study the report to develop a pathway forward to ensure such a collapse never happens again.

Earlier, the George Municipality also confirmed that the final report involving the independent structural investigation of the site, which was commissioned and undertaken by the Engineering Design Services (EDS), has been handed over to the police.

Human Settlements Minister, Thembu Simelane, said via a report that the municipality was at fault for approving the apartment block's plan when it was already in the process of construction.

The municipality clarified that they were audited with no significant findings and that the plans were approved in line with regulations and that they did not have evidence that the construction went ahead despite the approval being processed.

Simelane addressed the media on April 8, in which she revealed that five officials from the National Home Builders Regulatory Council (NHBRCC) were suspended and could face criminal charges, including that of the developers behind the construction, Neo Victoria Developments, and that there were no arrests at this stage.