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**Title:** GEORGE BUILDING COLLAPSE WAS PREVENTABLE

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## **FINDINGS RELEASED**

# **GEORGE BUILDING COLLAPSE WAS PREVENTABLE**

*'Weak regulatory environment to blame'*

SE-ANNE RALL

THE findings of a probe into the collapse of the 2024 George building collapse that claimed 34 lives shows that the tragedy could have been prevented.

It further showed that there were systemic failures, failures of planning, oversight, enforcement, and culture.

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Dean Macpherson released the findings in George at the weekend.

"At every problem, there was a chance to turn back, but because of weak regulatory environment, there was either no incentive or requirement to do so. And this is what makes me so angry when I view this tragedy from today's perspective, it was entirely preventable. However, we cannot undo what has happened," Macpherson said.

He said the full Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) investigation report has been completed and it will be published in the Government Gazette in due course.

Meanwhile, an appeal window to these findings is currently underway, which expires on August 3.

"This report must form part of the police investigation as we must establish criminal negligence for what happened. If criminal wrongdoing is established, those responsible must be prosecuted without delay. We must ensure that people are held accountable for 34 souls losing their lives. No contractor, engineer, or official should be beyond the reach of the law," Macpherson said.

The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) will establish a reporting protocol that mandates the registration of any structural system failure.

"A hotline will be launched to allow workers, built environment practitioners and professionals, or members of the public to anonymously raise safety concerns. These reports will trigger automatic inspections and, where necessary, emergency site shutdowns," the minister said.

Phase-based reform implementation

◆ **Phase One from 2025 to 2026:** Immediate interventions, including new regulations, mandatory standards and emergency protocols.

◆ **Phase Two from 2026 to 2028:** Implementation of long-term reform, including legislative amendments and competency-based registration systems.

◆ **Phase Three from 2028 onwards:** Institutional consolidation and relocation of custodianship of building regulations functions and standards to the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure.

"We are exploring options with the Department of Social Development and NGOs to provide relief or support to the families most affected, including those who have lost primary breadwinners," Macpherson said.

Meanwhile, Human Settlements Minister Thembi Simelane announced in April that five officials from the National Home Builders Regulatory Council (NHBR) were suspended.



THE site of the 2024 George building collapse, which left 34 people dead.  
| Independent Newspapers Archive

The police will investigate these officials, along with developers from Neo Victoria Developments, regarding their involvement in the collapse.

Simelane addressed the media in Pretoria, where she publicly released the full report into the NHBR's investigation.

The report has more than 280 pages with over 300 recommendations.

Simelane said the new Housing Consumer Protection Act, passed by President Cyril Ramaphosa in January, introduced significant changes to the legislative framework of South Africa's home building industry, as it established enforcement tools and prescribed appropriate penalties or sanctions to deter non-compliance by homebuilders.

She revealed damning evidence that George Municipality had approved the building plans despite it already being in construction.

The minister warned that builders found to be non-compliant or in breach under the new Act could face a fine of up to R1 million.

Section 78 also prescribed penalties for criminal offences, that may be a fine not exceeding R1.5m or imprisonment not exceeding 10 years.

Simelane told the media that only the police had the authority to criminally charge those mentioned in the report and confirmed that the officials together with Neo Victoria Development, were handed over for criminal investigation, but no one has been arrested yet.

The outcomes of the investigation also made recommendations that implicated officials be held accountable for their actions.