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Title: Serious safety violations were flagged days before tragedy struck in George



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Author: Nicola Daniels

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Serious safety violations were flagged days before tragedy struck in George

NICOLA DANIELS
nicola.daniels@intl.co.za

TWO days before the deadly George building collapse which claimed the lives of 34 people, a contractor observed unusual building movements and vibrations on the roof slab.

Cracks were also noted around the base of a column on the ground floor that resembled punch-through patterns. Concerns were apparently raised around the narrow supporting columns and the large spaces between them.

These and other damning findings came to light after Public Works and Infrastructure minister, Dean Macpherson, released the outcomes of investigations into the George building collapse, at a media briefing in George on Saturday.

He was joined by the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) as well as the Engineering Council of South Africa, who found a long list of issues behind the tragedy which claimed 34 lives and left a further 28 people seriously injured, last year.

"A subcontractor warned of cracks starting to appear as early as 2023 to the extent that one could see through them while standing in the basement. The site manager instructed these cracks to be patched with a mixture of sand, cement and mortar."

The health and safety agent also resigned during construction stating that it was "impossible to safeguard the interests of both the client and contractors amid continuous safety violations", the CBE said. The ECSA further found an engineer guilty for several contraventions including misrepresentation of academic or professional qualifications and failure to give due regard to and prioritise the health, safety, and interests of the public, among others.

"The Tribunal has decided to impose the following sanctions, a maximum permissible fine in terms of the Adjustment Fines Act and cancellation of the respondent's registration and the removal of their name from the ECSA register," the regulator said.

Macpherson said the report would also form part of the police investigation.

"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."

He said the concrete used in the slabs did not meet required specifications.

"Where 19 to 25 megapascal were needed, only 13 megapascal of concrete were delivered."

"These are not minor oversights. These are systemic failures, failures of planning, oversight, enforcement, and culture. What happened here more than a year ago was a lethal convergence of these failures which resulted in the deaths of 34 people. At every problem, there was a chance to turn back, but because of the weak regulatory environment, there was either no incentive or requirement to do so," Macpherson said.

Police spokesperson, Christopher Spies confirmed their investigation was still underway.

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