

Deputy Minister of Public Works
Rev KM Zondi
20 March 2003

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Launch of the HIV/AIDS Awareness campaign

Gugulethu

Master of Ceremonies, Mr German Mphahlele;
Director - General of the National Department of Public Works, Mr James Maseko
Deputy Director - General for Transport and Public Works in the Western Cape, Mr Richard Pertesen
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my privilege today to say a few words at this auspicious occasion where the National Department of Public Works is launching its HIV/AIDS awareness campaign for the construction industry in the Western Cape, in cooperation with the Western Cape Provincial Department of Transport and Public Works and the City of Cape Town.

Please allow me to convey the Minister's apology for her inability to be here owing to other pressing commitments and her sincerest regards to you and to reiterate her full support and active encouragement in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

HIV/AIDS in the construction industry

Research conducted by various construction industry stakeholders and the Department indicates that the construction industry has the third highest incidence rate of HIV/AIDS per economic sector in South Africa, with very little being done to address the problem in this particular sector. Failure to address the situation will impact negatively on the South African economy especially in relation to increases in absenteeism, accidents, skills shortages of up to 35%, cost of retraining and decreased levels of productivity.

HIV/AIDS awareness campaign on Public Works construction projects

It is in this light that the Department has initiated a project aimed at creating awareness about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the construction industry. As leaders of this industry, we are required to lead by example and to champion and promote best practices that would enhance growth and development of the industry.

The overall goal of the strategy is to improve health and safety in the construction industry through the implementation of HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns on construction sites. The core of the HIV/AIDS awareness strategy hinges on construction companies and employers making a conscious effort to effectively address this pandemic within the sector. The implementation of the strategy will become mandatory for all contractors tendering for DPW contracts after completion of the pilot projects.

The campaign is aimed at addressing, together with partners in the construction industry, issues such as HIV/AIDS training/prevention programmes, encouragement of voluntary HIV/AIDS and STI testing, the creation of a non-discriminatory environment, the establishment of counselling and referral systems for support and care and the promotion of respect for the rights and obligations of individuals as well as employer responsibility - specifically within the construction industry.

Amendments to Procurement

The Department's tender and contract documents are currently being amended to ensure enforcement of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign on Public Works projects. The amendments to the procurement process will be phased into all DPW tender documentation on completion of the pilot projects.

In order to ensure that the DPW strategy is adhered to, our project managers will verify conformance to the strategy by means of a standard checklist during each construction progress inspection. Contractors will be penalised if they are found not to be adhering to the Department's mandatory requirements in terms of implementing HIV/AIDS awareness on Public Works construction projects.

Once the strategy is rolled-out to the entire construction industry, the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) will carry out random monitoring.

Implementation and evaluation of pilot projects

In order for the Department to ensure that the proposed HIV/AIDS strategy is consistent with the challenges facing the construction industry, the Department is implementing and evaluating the strategy on 4 Public Works projects. On 21st October 2002, the Minister of Public Works, Ms Stella Sigcau and former President Mr Nelson Mandela launched the HIV/AIDS awareness strategy for the construction industry at the Nelson Mandela Museum in Qunu, Eastern Cape.

The implementation of the HIV/AIDS awareness programme on the remaining 3 pilot projects commenced in February 2003.

It is with a great sense of duty and service to our people that one is here today to launch the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign on the second pilot project, which is the construction site of the Gugulethu Social Services District Office in cooperation with the Western Cape Provincial Department of Transport and Public Works and the City of Cape Town. This construction project enjoys widespread recognition as it has been profiled as a best practice black economic empowerment contract, and the project has managed to achieve co-operation from all three spheres of Government and the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Western Cape Provincial Department of Transport and Public Works and the contractor, Magqwaka Construction for the commitment and enthusiasm they have displayed in cooperating with the National Department of Public Works to implement the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign on this project. The Provincial Department has taken the initiative to incorporate HIV/AIDS awareness from the tender stage of this project even prior to the finalization of the national strategy.

I would also like to thank the City of Cape Town's HIV/AIDS Workplace Programme for the contributions they have made in terms of assisting the Department of Public Works with the provision of HIV/AIDS awareness workshops on this construction site. The first awareness workshops commenced this morning, and were attended by all construction workers from this construction site. Successive workshops will continue during the next few months to reinforce information relating to HIV/AIDS and to encourage construction workers and the surrounding community to go for voluntary testing and counselling at clinics here in Gugulethu.

The findings from these pilot projects will contribute to lessons learnt, inform the finalization of the strategy and the development of best practice guidelines for HIV/AIDS in the construction industry.

With regard to HIV/AIDS in particular, our focus remains: a massive prevention campaign directed at ensuring that the high rates of awareness translate into a change in lifestyles; care for the affected and infected; treatment of all diseases including those associated with HIV/AIDS.

In his 2003 Budget Speech, the Minister of Finance, Mr Trevor Manuel indicated that the 2003 Budget provides for a substantial reinforcement of Government's response to the health care challenges we face. "Over the next three years, an additional R3,3 billion has been added to provincial equitable share and conditional grants to extend preventative programmes and finance medically appropriate treatment for HIV/AIDS."

These words clearly indicate to us how the Public Works awareness campaign to address HIV/AIDS in the construction industry forms part of Government's effort to deal with this scourge.

It is my pleasure also to hand to Mr Andile Maqgwaka, a partner in Maqgwaka Construction, the contractor on site, a copy of the video we watched before. I want to thank him for recognising the importance of this awareness campaign and for agreeing to the launch of the campaign on this project.

In conclusion:

I wish to draw your attention to the wise observation of Marlene Gill, who wrote:
"To exist is to change,
To change is to mature,
To mature is to go on creating one's self endlessly,".

As we continue to change and to mature as individuals and as a nation, let us continue to dream that one day, very soon, HIV/AIDS will no longer devastate our nation, that all of our young people will resort to responsible behaviour and that the morals and values of our forebears will once more dominate our society.

LET US DARE TO DREAM. For it is not an impossible dream.

I thank you.

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