



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**JOINT MEDIA BRIEFING BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ON THE ARSON ATTEMPT AT CIVITAS BUILDING  
(NATIONAL HEAD OFFICE OF HEALTH)**

***Background***

Civitas is a state of the art building which has been poorly maintained – and Public Works must take responsibility for that.

Poor maintenance – in part – resulted in malfunctioning of the air-conditioning, in particular. As a result, employees – quite legitimately – protested their working conditions. However, we strongly reject the sensationalist headlines suggesting that the Department of Health “Civitas” building is a death trap because the building has never been declared uninhabitable by all appropriate and authorised institutions that undertook an assessment of the building.

One of the features of an unsafe building is the risk of fire however the Civitas building has five security features, namely:

- smoke detectors,
- fire siren/alarm,
- integrated sprinkler system throughout the building,
- fire hose reels,
- potable fire extinguishers.

In addition to these features, the building has a Health and Safety committee which is operational within the building and moreover each floor has a trained fire marshal and trained first aiders.

All of these are presently functioning except that the integrated sprinkler system does not have enough pressure and the Department of Public Works is working on it.

We are working jointly – as the Departments of Public Works and Health – to implement interim and long-term solutions – in terms of immediate repairs, longer term refurbishment and making available alternative accommodation in the interim.

### ***Acts of Criminality***

What has come to light over the past two weeks which has intensified this week are deliberate acts of sabotage which are targeting this five fire features to make them dysfunctional at Civitas building.

Secondly the most sensitive system in the building is the HVAC (Heat Ventilation and Air Conditioning and Cooling system).

When people say the building is inhabitable they are mostly referring to these HVAC system and Department of Public works as the owners of the systems accepts that the HVAC system must be functional at all times because the building has no windows that can be open.

We are now dealing with a concerted campaign of criminal – and potentially lethal sabotage. Examples include:

- Where contractors have made repairs on air-conditioning units, they return to find the wiring cut.
- The disabling of smoke detectors
- Disabling of security cameras
- Breaking of locks and forced entry to the building and control rooms

The following cases have been reported to the SAPS:

- The removal of the earth cable from the chiller plant in Basement 3. The effect of this would be the very real danger of sparking a fire.
- Damage to the 16<sup>th</sup> Floor Boardroom
- An arson attempt on Tuesday in Basement 3.

There were two arson attempts this week, with the most recent yesterday afternoon with a fire set on the 14<sup>th</sup> Floor whilst there were still people in the building.

Fortunately, the alarms went off and staff were able to extinguish the blaze – otherwise the results might have been lethal.

### **Action**

We condemn these acts of criminal sabotage – which are life-threatening.

We call on law enforcement to investigate these criminal activities.

We will also be intensifying the security on our buildings.

We are also bound to notice the coincidence of the fire at the provincial government offices in Johannesburg which apparently started in a room containing legal documents. We must all be very vigilant.

In the case of the National Office of the Department of Health – Civitas Building – clearly, there is a malicious attempt to exploit and exacerbate the legitimate grievances of employees.

We are bound to suspect a hidden hand at work here. Are we witnessing new tactics in the ‘fight-back’ by State Capture forces – which Minister Gordhan talks about? After all, part of State Capture involved elements within the security apparatus – also suspected of being responsible for attacks on organisations seen to be fighting corruption.

We are now in the era of what Minister Gordhan calls ‘Bell-Pottinger Phase 2’ – where individuals and ministers seen to be fighting state capture and corruption will be targeted or smeared. This narrative is growing:

- Articles based on lies about Public Works provided by anonymous informants – akin to the scandal of the Rogue Unit coverage by the Sunday Times.
- And now the problems facing the Health department in its Pretoria and Johannesburg offices.

As I said: it is a time for extreme vigilance by all of us. But it must not be allowed to distract us from the primary task of service delivery – particularly for the

Department of Health which is charged with the mammoth task of delivering quality healthcare to all. It is the responsibility of Public Works to support them in this.

**Issued by the Departments of Public Works and Department of Health**

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