

Mortuary go-slow : MEC Dhlomo criticises workers actions, gets involved in processing of bodies

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KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has criticised a go-slow by forensic pathology services staff at the Fort Napier Medico-Legal Mortuary, which has severely affected several families' plans to bury their loved ones.

Normally, the mortuary performs between 10 – 12 autopsies per day. However, since the go-slow began, the workers have been performing a maximum of two bodies per day – causing the number to accumulate. Currently, there is a backlog of 26 bodies that need to be processed.

Earlier today, a concerned MEC Dhlomo – who holds a diploma in forensic pathology - went to the mortuary, where he personally performed two autopsies.

The MEC has since given his assurance that more autopsies will be completed, starting from tomorrow, in order to help the affected families bury their loved ones.

While the Department implements its contingency measures to speed up the completion of autopsies, the MEC has also instructed the Department's legal unit to get a court interdict to force the employees to either return to optimal performance - or face expulsion in terms of labour relations legislation which governs essential services.

Although the workers don't belong to any recognized labour formation, the MEC has nevertheless reported their actions to the provincial leadership of COSATU.

MEC Dhlomo has also apologised to the grieving families who are now being subjected to secondary trauma by the workers' actions. He has assured them that the Department will do its utmost to ensure that they are able to conduct burials from tomorrow onwards.

Reflecting on the situation, MEC Dhlomo said: "We were informed that there's a crisis at the Fort Napier Mortuary, where workers want to force the department to discuss issues that are being dealt with at the National Bargaining Council. We've actually indicated to them that these issues are being dealt with. We know that this action is not led by the union.... They're not part of this.

"I've reported to the leadership of COSATU in the Province that it is unbecoming for workers to, without any dispute, just embark on a go-slow. They're doing two bodies per day. As a result, bodies have been piling up. We've asked the Department to urgently get an interdict to get them out of the premises or go to work fully.

"Families are here, desperate, and crying. They are supposed to have buried over the weekend, and they have not. The people of South Africa will judge for themselves [what kind of people these are]... I am here to add my weight to contribute towards making sure that families will be able to bury their loved ones, starting from tomorrow and the weekend. We want to make sure that families that need to bury their loved ones do.

Anyone who plans to go on strike first embarks on talks, and if matters reach a deadlock, then you go on strike. I want to assure our fellow compatriots that we are here for them. We will help them bury their loved ones. We are very sorry for what has happened. If we don't make sufficient progress, we will send the bodies elsewhere, where they will get processed.