

Media Release

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KwaZulu-Natal Cabinet wants urgent action on Gale Street Mortuary

Today; the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, briefed cabinet on the situation at the Gale (Magwaza Maphalala) Street mortuary to their appreciation and call for resolution by next week.

At a cabinet meeting currently underway, the MEC briefed his counterparts on the dire situation at the Gale Street mortuary and also presented a plan that would see to a speedy resolution of the matter. The MEC reported that the facility can accommodate 160 bodies but is currently having 185 bodies including the long-term unidentified bodies leading to overcrowding of unclaimed bodies and unhygienic conditions. Cabinet expressed concern and appreciation for the MEC's brief as they had only heard of this matter on media reports and complaints from the general public. They also wanted to know where the gaps are so that the situation does not repeat itself in the future.

"This is totally unacceptable. All the bodies must be disposed of by next week and disciplinary processes should commence immediately against whomever is responsible for this," Premier Zweli Mkhize said.

Cabinet reminded the MEC that during the 1980's floods unclaimed bodies were buried within a short space of time and the same approach could be used.

The MEC wishes to announce that in the interim, the interdepartmental task team comprised of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Health will expedite the necessary processes in order to ensure that the bodies that have not been claimed are buried. Secondly, he pleads with the public to understand that bodies will be moved to Phoenix mortuary as a temporary measure whilst the 'clean-up' at Gale Street is undertaken.

"Lastly, proximity to the dead is deeply disturbing as may be odours produced by bodies amongst other things. This form of work always has a very negative psychosocial impact at the individual (worker) level since it is contrary to the very socio-cultural beliefs we hold. Psychosocial interventions in the mortuary will be made available to help our workers, who have long served under these conditions, cope. We also want to conduct our work carefully to help families and loved ones deal with their loss. We want to urge the public to abide with us as we try to resolve the matter. The workers have assured me of their full cooperation and support and I have been informed that more doctors have come forward to help with post-mortems" says the MEC for Health.

ENDS!

Issued on behalf of Cabinet by:
Cyril Madlala
Head: KZN Provincial Communications