

# Media Release

TO: ALL MEDIA  
DATE: 3 FEBRUARY 2010  
EMBARGO: NONE

## **The MEC for Health outlines a plan to handle mortuary backlogs**

The KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, has put together an interdepartmental task team to address the backlogs in the government mortuaries leading to overcrowding of unclaimed bodies and mortuaries being full to capacity.

This follows media enquiries and reports about the Gale Street mortuary being full and bodies being sent to other mortuaries within eThekweni. Other people have complained about poor service, due to staff shortages, and bad smell at some government mortuaries; Gale Street, Pinetown, Phoenix and Pietermaritzburg mortuaries in particular. The task team is comprised of officials from both the Department of Health and the South African Police Service (SAPS) detectives unit.

“Yes we have some problems that we have committed to addressing within a week. We know that people complain about ‘decomposing’ bodies; however the nature of forensic work involves receiving bodies in unpleasant state and other already in the process of decomposition hence the complaints. We must also indicate that we are still in a summer season with very high temperatures, which in these parts of the province lasts longer,

“What is of critical importance and exacerbating the situation is that our people do not inform the police early if their next of kin has disappeared or presumed deceased. This means that we must keep the bodies until the whole identification process has been exhausted” said the MEC for Health.

Professor Steven Naidoo, Chief Forensic Pathologist, added that; “At least we now we approach this challenge as a team –Health and SAPS. We have agreed on a protocol to be followed so that we can ensure that the legal requirements for identification processes using techniques such as finger prints, X-ray, dental records and DNA are met. In the coming week we shall be operating from Phoenix where we would do most post-mortems to clear this mortuary (Gale Street) and also ensure that all new cases are dealt with.”

The MEC met workers at the mortuary in the morning where he thanked them for their fortitude under difficult conditions. He pleaded with the workers to support the plan to bring operations back to normal and ensure that people coming to identify their relatives receive the best of service befitting their bereavement. A Psychologist has also been seconded to the mortuary to provide support and counseling.

“We will address these challenges so that we provide an efficient and a caring mortuary service. A number of interventions will be put in place so that all our clients are satisfied. In our culture (and many others including religious persuasions) respect for the dead and the bereaved is very important and our services must reflect that. The criminal element also reared its ugly face last week when the theft of electric cables lead to electric supply disruption. Our back-up generators carried the mortuary until the municipality rectified the problem” the MEC concluded.

ENDS!

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: KWAZULU-NATAL  
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

