

KZN Health MEC thanks the police for tracking down Ambulance strippers

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KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has hailed the diligent work performed by Police that led to the cracking of a syndicate in Newcastle.

This syndicate involving a Taxi Boss and employees of the Department of Health is suspected of stripping off Ambulances' parts and fitting them into taxis. Early this morning the suspected Taxi Boss was arrested in Newcastle and three of his taxis impounded. One of the taxis, when impounded was loaded with passengers enroute to Swaziland for the Easter break.

The suspect is said to have been targeting the Department's VW Crafter Ambulances whose parts were stripped and fitted into his 22 Seater Busses. The arrested suspect has nine of these Kombis.

In hailing this breakthrough, the MEC decried the fact that the employees of the Department are involved in this heinous crime saying: *'It is really very painful that an employee who rose through the ranks to become a head of section is the one responsible for this misery that results into the shortage of Ambulances. Surely the stripped Ambulances pose a great danger to both our patients and paramedics as the original parts are replaced by the worn out ones whose safety and durability cannot be guaranteed.'*

I have hence decided to hold a meeting on Tuesday next week with all the Districts' Emergency Medical Service's heads. I want them to give an explanation as to how these fairly new Ambulances end up requiring replacement of gearboxes; tyres; starters and other parts that are supposed to have a longer lifespan.'



MEC Dhlomo and the Amajuba District Mayor, Dr Musa Ngubane inspecting the impounded vehicles at the Newcastle Police compound

The MEC says the Managers have to account about how these Ambulances are managed and monitored.

Referring to the suspect taxi boss, MEC Dhlomo said this crime tarnishes the good relationship that the Department has with the Taxi industry as; *'they have allowed us space to provide health services in their ranks and this benefit both the drivers and commuters who would in most cases find it difficult to access healthcare due to the hours they observe.'*

The suspect is expected to appear in court tomorrow morning whilst the Police have confirmed that more arrests are to follow.