



MEDIA RELEASE

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EMBARGO: Immediate

Social Support

Following the devastating fires of 7 June, the Knysna Municipality facilitated storage for clothing and other goods in Woodmill Walk and other areas. Based on the municipal surveys of needs, and demand patterns the stored goods were deemed to be in excess and not immediately required by fire victims in Woodmill Walk.

Stored Goods

Knysna Municipal Manager, Kam Chetty explains: "An incorrect perception exists that the Municipality has hoarded the stored goods. This could not be further from the truth. For weeks after the fires, NGOs distributed good to the victims of the fire."

He added: "As we are now moving into the second phase of our fire recovery, namely the rebuild phase, a meeting was called with all relevant local NGO's, Garden Route Rebuild, the Department of Social Development (DSD) and I. It was during this meeting that we discussed the stored goods, and the NGOs were in agreement that currently there was no need for the clothing."

Redistribution of Goods

The DSD is responsible for coordinating social support and will develop a storage and distribution plan, together with the Knysna Municipality, and with the help of their registered NGOs, redistribute these. The local NGO's were aware of this arrangement and in agreement thereof.

"I must stress that these goods were never destined to leave Knysna. It was decided that as our focus should now shift to assisting the fire victims with goods such as building materials, white goods etc., the DSD should use their registered NGOs to further assist with the distribution of the stored goods, and that local NGOs could from now on be in contact with the DSD. The local NGOs were all in agreement that the market had been saturated with clothing, and should any fire victims be in need of any of the stored goods, they would contact the DSD, and accredited NGOs" explained Chetty.

Red Cross SA

Due to its good governance, accountability and storage facilities, the South African Red Cross Society, Knysna was asked to assist with the redistribution of the stored goods. "Not once was it said, or decided upon to send the goods out-of-town or to prevent fire victims' access to these goods," said Chetty.

Access to the storage facility

On Thursday, 7 September, a local NGO asked for access to the storage facility to see if there may be any goods that their fire victims could utilise. Unbeknown to the Municipality this NGO advertised on social media that they would open the facility for fire victims to personally choose any goods.

“The municipality was never involved in this, and once we became aware that the facility was to be opened for a second time on the Saturday, and realised the we could not possibly assist with any security measures at such short notice, we immediately put out a message on our social media platforms that this was not to happen,” Chetty said.

Way forward

The local NGOs have been approached by Garden Route Rebuild to suggest a way on the redistribution of the goods. “The important issue here is that there is a lack of storage and as the Knysna Municipality is now moving towards the rebuild phase, we are handing the donations and distribution thereof over to the DSD. The goods need to be moved, especially as the storage costs may now double.

I would like to invite the residents to make suggestions on how we can approach the rebuild phase, especially with suggestions of possible donations of building material etc. Greater Knysna has suffered so much pain in the past three months, and it is now time for all of us to join hands in working together to rebuild Knysna to be even better than it was before,” concluded Chetty.

ENDS

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