

Families suffering in R1 bn IOD bungle

Couples tell of no payments torment

Yolandé Stander

WEEKEND POST REPORTER

standeryo@zusa.co.za

THOUSANDS of maimed and seriously injured workers and their families are struggling to survive after Labour Department bungles have led to injury on duty (IOD) payments worth an estimated R1-billion having come to a virtual standstill since October last year.

This has caused some accident victims to struggle to put food on the table while others have lost their homes.

More have lost limbs or are suffering excruciating pain as they cannot afford to obtain treatment without the money owed by the department.

It has been plagued by administrative issues and mismanagement since 2008, having received disclaimers from the auditor-general every year since.

The latest heartbreak for claimants has been caused by a series of "major system migration glitches" which Labour Department commissioner Shadrack Mkhonto has admitted have led to millions of rands not being paid out since October.

Accident victims and the company acting as their liaison with the department confirmed the extent of the problem to Weekend Post. But department compensation fund spokesman Dikentsho Seabo refused to answer inquiries.

Port Elizabeth-based liaison company CompSol says its records show not a single claim has been paid out nationally since October last year.

Further, about 95% of all IOD cases it has reported to the compensation fund have not been registered after a new electronic system was implemented to reduce paper-based processes.

Employers are also suffering as they are not being refunded for paying their workers during their time of absence, despite paying a contribution to the fund annually. Some healthcare profes-

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sionals have refused to handle IOD cases as they are not paid.

CompSol – the largest IOD claims processor in the country outside the fund – says it has submitted 35 000 claims since October. Not one has been paid out, only 30% of the claims have been registered and only 14% have been approved.

Managing director Fritz Lüttich said based on the fund's annual figures this meant that nationally hundreds of thousands of medical bill claims worth about R1-billion would not have

been processed since October.

One couple who have suffered are Gerhardt and Louise Steyn, of Aston Bay, who lost their home and have had to rely on family members to survive.

Gerhardt lost the use of his arm in 2010 after the limb was pulled into a boiler belt at an industrial plant in Tsitsikamma.

Louise said attempts to claim from the fund had been unsuccessful. "I had to drive to and from Port Elizabeth to get the ball rolling but no one was able to help. There was just no information available to assist workers," Louise said.

They eventually lost their home and had to move into a family member's home besides relying on her brother's charity to survive. "It is humiliating to have to rely on others."

It was only in August last year that the couple, with the help of CompSol, managed to have their claim processed.

But the fund refused to pay compensation totalling R40 000 from December 2010 to May 2011 because Gerhardt had not seen a medical practitioner during this period. The fund requires IOD claimants to visit a doctor every month.

"The only reason we didn't go to the doctor was because we didn't have the money because the fund didn't pay us.

"During all of this, I also lost my job," Louise said.

"Some days we don't know where we are going to get food from. We have also had to move three times."

Anika and Chris Vorster, of Kareedouw, are also battling after Chris's compensation payout stopped for more than 10 years, despite numerous attempts to have it reinstated.

They lost their business and home and now have to live with

their children. Chris, the main breadwinner, suffered a head injury – causing him to have epileptic fits – in 1978 when he was hit by a rigger hook.

He managed to put in a successful claim and received up to R1 700 a month compensation.

But then it stopped.

Only after turning to CompSol did they manage to resolve the issue in February this year.

But his claims for medication and treatment have never been paid and he has had to cover this out of his pension.

"Chris's epilepsy pills alone are R800 a month, but he also

suffers from severe headaches and takes medication for that," Anika said.

"His medication causes depression and insomnia, so he has to take anti-depressants and sleeping tablets too."

Lüttich said he had encountered an amputee from George who had to have an additional part of his leg removed due to delays with the fund.

The man lost the lower part of his leg during an IOD accident in 1977 and received a prosthetic leg through the fund.

By 2003 his prosthesis was worn through and did not fit

properly, causing an ulcer just below his knee. Between 2003 and 2006 he applied for a refit five times without success.

Because of the ulcer, doctors had to amputate further and the fund paid for a new prosthesis only in May 2008.

"We see such cases on a daily basis," Lüttich said.

"We see people who battle to obtain new prosthetics because of the fund's inability to process claims.

"We see people who have to mend their own prosthetics with pieces of wire and sticky tape just to be able to get around."