

# Panicking Joburg CBD fire victims were 'squashed against closed gate'

*'We heard a big noise and people crying,' an eyewitness said.*



*Johannesburg Emergency Management Services on the scene of the fire in a Joburg CBD building.  
Picture: Tracy-Lee Stark*

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City of Joburg MMC for public safety Dr Mgcini Tshwaku says the devastation caused by a blaze in the Johannesburg CBD on Thursday was made worse by a locked security gate, which led to dozens being crushed to death.

At least 64 people, including a one-year-old and six other children, died and more than 43 others were injured when a fire broke out at a five-storey building in the [city](#).

Tshwaku told media at the scene of the [fire](#) that a locked security gate caused further panic and disaster.

“A gate was closed, so people couldn’t get out. When firefighters came in they saw people who were being smashed against a security gate,” he said. He said he had never seen such a devastating scene.

“I have never seen bodies burnt like that, beyond recognition. There were also kids. It is a very sad scene.”

The MMC said the building was one of many in the city that is home to informal settlements with no water or lights. He called for such buildings to be closed with immediate effect.

An eyewitness told [Newzroom Afrika](#) there were widespread cries of panic when the fire broke out.

“We heard a big noise and people crying. When we opened the windows, we saw a fire. People started moving down (evacuating) and others were on the floor. I hit my window down”.

Johannesburg [Emergency Management Services \(EMS\)](#) spokesperson Robert Mulaudzi said partitions in the building made rescue efforts more difficult.

“Informal areas where there are partitions, so the risk of a person being trapped is high. We want to remove any uncertainty by making sure we are clearing the building floor-by-floor.”

The injured were taken to health facilities across the province, while trauma counsellors were also on-site to help the distressed.

Mulaudzi said those taken to hospital suffered smoke inhalation and minor injuries.

“We hope they will be discharged today or tomorrow.”

Johannesburg Mayor Kabelo Gwamanda is visiting the scene.