

Public protector to probe death-trap taxis

By [Sipho Mabena](#)

19 Jun 2017

Public Protector Busisiwe Mkhwebane has teamed up with the Special Investigating Unit on an investigation into the illegal conversion of panel vans so that they can be sold as minibus taxis to unsuspecting taxi owners.



© Leon Swart – [123RF.com](#)

Manufacturer Toyota has refused to issue a certificate of authorisation on the conversions for safety reasons.

Mkhwebane's office confirmed that the investigation, started by her predecessor, Thuli Mandonsele, would get forensic assistance from the SIU.

A source with knowledge of the investigation said the SIU would also help probe "deception and fraud" in the financing of minibus taxis.

Major financial institutions, including Toyota Financial Services, SA Taxi Finance and banks, have unknowingly financed the illegal conversions. The fake taxis are sooner or later taken off the road for safety reasons, leaving taxi owners heavily indebted and without a vehicle.

2,353 illegally converted minibuses

Last year the Department of Transport said 2,353 illegally converted minibuses had been identified.

Whistleblower Hennie de Beer, a former taxi finance manager at Absa, told a public hearing in Pretoria convened by Mandonsele last year that cutting the panels in panel vans to fit windows weakened the taxi's structure, greatly reducing the chances of survival for accident victims.

The seats are bolted to the weak floorboards instead of the chassis and seatbelts are attached to the seats instead of the vehicle's body. This could result in passengers being flung out of the vehicle in their seats in an accident.

De Beer said he had documented at least 200 accidents in which passengers were flung out.

Cleopatra Mosene, Mkhwebane's spokesman, said the investigation was at an advanced stage.

More testimony was to be heard, including that of former deputy transport minister Jeremy Cronin, and the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications and the SA Bureau of Standards.

Source: The Times

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>