

COMMUNICATION TO STAKEHOLDERS

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DELAYS IN SHIPMENT RELEASE AT OR TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority has experienced challenges in exercising its function to review and stamp the documents of incoming shipments of medicines, medical devices and scheduled substances at the OR Tambo International Airport port of entry.

The delay has been caused by a recent relocation of the office that the Border Medicines Control Technicians perform this function out of.

Due to delays in the allocation of a new office location in the New Agents Building administered by the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA), contingencies had to be put in place for the electronic submission and review of documents by SAHPRA personnel.

The electronic submission method has caused considerable delays due to a number of reasons, inter alia; the inherent slow nature of the electronic submission process, duplicate submissions, large file downloads and multiple follow ups from shipping agents – bottlenecking the sequential processing workflow.

SAHPRA is in the process of finalising its office allocation arrangements with ACSA, after which the process of physical review and stamping will resume.

SAHPRA is cognisant of the current backlog and has added additional resources to reduce the electronic submission backlog.

For context, we point out that prior to the office relocation exercise, the SAHPRA border medicines technician was housed in the office of the Border Management Agency/Port Health, who assisted with the screening aspect of documents, this of course had a positive impact on the processing pace and consequently with the relocation of the SAHPRA team, this further compounded the processing pace affected by the lengthy electronic approvals process.

This has been well noted and this aspect of the process will be monitored further when the SAHPRA technicians take up office in the New Agents Building and review documents without support from BMA, so further refinements may be made to ensure a streamlined procedure.

Whilst we anticipate that the temporary additional resources should already make a good impact on the backlog by the end of next week, we will drive this throughout May 2024 and expect that the backlog should clear soon and, with the teething issues with office relocation, we resolve to have process normalised before end of June 2024.

We kindly request that appointed freight forwarding agents follow up on their initial requests only within 48 hours after the initial request and indicate **clearly** that its “2nd Request” – so it is easier to identify duplications — as the constant stream of follow-up emails multiple times a day does not speed up anything, in fact, it achieves quite the reverse, as we have a number of resources working on the mails – they are constantly duplicating efforts instead of being able to systematically distribute actual work to the SAHPRA staff members that still requires processing. This has had a very detrimental impact and has unfortunately wasted a significant number of man hours and exacerbated the backlog. This has not been helpful at all. We kindly request that you flag this to your freight partners.

We thank you for your understanding and apologise for the inconvenience due to the abrupt and unplanned change we have faced.

Sincerely,

Christelna Reynecke, SAHPRA Chief Operating Officer