

Ready for Action

From its humble beginnings in KwaZulu-Natal eleven years ago, Action Training Academy (ATA) has since emerged as one of South Africa's frontrunners in occupational health and safety (OHS) and emergency medicine training.

In 2000, the three directors of ATA identified a gap in the health and safety market when OHS was made a legislatively compliant criterion for all businesses by the Department of Labour (DoL). This compliance requirement, coupled with a critical shortage of trained and experienced health and safety professionals, resulted in the establishment of ATA – a unique business specialising in emergency medical/paramedic and health and safety courses, services, products and equipment.

OHS as a business imperative

ATA director Alastair Farish points out that the driving force behind ATA is the fact that OHS is core to the successful long-term sustainability of any business, and the need for people trained in this field is growing every day. "Last year alone, we trained over 22 000 people in accredited first aid, fire-fighting, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and health and safety courses," notes Alastair.

Within South Africa, the DoL reports that occupational accidents and disease cost the country in the region of 3.5% of the gross domestic product (GDP), which translates to roughly R30-billion. Alastair, an advanced life support paramedic with more than 18 years experience, points out that this is partly because there is simply not enough corporate awareness and education around health and safety issues in the workplace.

"Even though there has been a slight improvement in OHS practices in South Africa over the last few years; there

Left: ATA ITD Director Trevor Justus. Right: Alastair Farish, Action Training Academy.



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are still many organisations that are unaware of what is required of them with regard to the minimum requirements as stipulated by the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993," he adds.

The need to be OHS compliant should be a business imperative for any organisation. The Department of Labour (DoL) is increasing the numbers of inspectors in the field to monitor the health and safety activities of organisations. If an inspector finds that there has been a serious injury or loss of life due to negligence, employees, management or the organisation could be held liable to a hefty fine and/or imprisonment.

"Our core purpose is to provide an all-in-one solution to equip medical professionals with internationally-certified courses that are generally regarded as being obligatory in respect of health and safety regulation compliance."

"OHS compliance often seems like an 'uphill battle' with all the listed requirements; however, what many businesses don't realise is that they may already be compliant with a number of requirements.

"Our objective at ATA is to assist organisations in planning their OHS system implementation and procedures, and to ensure that continuous compliance is made as easy as possible," explains Alastair.

National OHS training provider

ATA has established itself as a national training provider with branches in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern and Western Cape. The company's range of courses in first aid, fire-fighting, health and safety management and training, emergency training, paramedics, and fire equipment servicing are geared towards employees and/or management, as well as private individuals.



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Within a business, the OHS Act does not expect the employer to take sole responsibility for health and safety.

The Act is based on the principle that hazards and risks in the workplace must be addressed by communication and cooperation between the employer and the employees.

The employer and employees must share the responsibility for health and safety in the workplace and work together to mitigate all hazards and risks. Hence, the strong need for structured health and safety training courses and programmes for both employers and employees.

ATA offers eight separate health and safety courses, ranging from the four-hour 'Basic Health and Safety Induction' course, which covers basic fundamentals, to



the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA) accredited ten-day 'Health and Safety Officer' course.

Farish points out that ATA is the only training centre in South Africa to be accredited by the world-renowned British Safety Council (BSC). The course is developed to meet the health and safety needs of line managers, supervisors, team leaders, heads-of-department and junior managers. The training course gives participants a theoretical and practical understanding of health and safety, and how it can be successfully applied within the workplace.

"This means that in addition to our SETA-accredited Safety Officer certificate, all competent candidates will receive a BSC Award in 'Level 2 Supervising Staff Safety', which is internationally-recognised. This is a giant leap for our health and safety programmes, and we are excited about the future, and what the relationship with the BSC holds," says Alastair.

Medical proficiencies training

Action Training Academy's International Training Division (ATA ITD) was established in 2009 and serves medical professionals operating in remote and isolated locations in Africa and the Middle East.

ATA ITD director Trevor Justus notes that the majority of the medical professionals that attend ATA ITD courses operate in remote and isolated environments in the oil and gas, mining, manufacturing or construction industries and have not been exposed for an extended period of time to the specific roles which they are trained to fulfil.

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"These educational offerings are aimed at empowering medical staff by maintaining their knowledge and technical capabilities," says Trevor. He adds that ATA ITD sets itself apart from its competitors, as it is one of a few companies that fully-registers its international students to work as either doctors or nurses at Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital, in order to provide them with hands-on experience in hospital wards.

Practical experiential training (PET) at Charlotte Maxeke Academic is carried out in the Trauma Unit, which involves work experience in the Emergency Room (ER) and in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). What's more, students are also provided with pre-hospital management training, a road-based service that exposes students to the initial management of medical, surgical, cardiac, pediatric and obstetric emergencies.

In addition to medical training courses, Trevor concludes by adding that ATA (ITD) also provides a wide range of training programmes that include: aviation healthcare; offshore survival; technical rescue and firefighting courses. ♦

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