

# PRESS RELEASE

## Preparing your business for an emergency

**10 February, 2011:** The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that every year globally, more than 2-million people die from occupational accidents or work-related diseases. This is as a direct result of poor and hazardous work environments. Within South Africa, the Department of Labour (DOL) reports that occupational accidents and disease costs the country in the region of 3,5 % of the gross domestic product (GDP), which translates to roughly R30-billion.

The Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) Act, 1993, requires that employers bring about and maintain, as far as reasonably practicable, a work environment that is safe and without risk to the health of the employees. However, Action Training Academy Director **Alastair Farish** points out that many businesses are unaware of what is required of them by law, as well as how to create a healthy, safe and prepared environment, which empowers workers with the knowledge and skills to act if an emergency occurs," says Farish.

A solution to scenarios such as medical emergencies, unexpected fires or building evacuations is a structured approach, in line with the OSH Act's requirements as well as regulations of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) as outlined below:

- **SABS 0400** (Section T Fire Protection): This regulation looks at aspects such as a building's occupancy classification, how many extinguishers are needed per square metre, how many people occupy each square metre, as well as the location of the extinguishers within the building, etc...
- **SABS 0139** (Fire Protection Planning): This regulation looks at the following aspects: emergency evacuation routes, the width of the evacuation routes, the number of people the staircases can handle, the number of routes there should be per floor as well as throughout the entire building depending on occupancy, etc...
- **SABS 1475** (Fire Fighting Equipment): This regulation looks at aspects such as how to service fire extinguishers, hose reels and hydrants; including the required flow rates.

Through years of exposure and experience to various health and safety systems and regulations, Action Training Academy has developed a product that is flexible in its application to ensure that all companies are able to apply the product principles.

"The product principles are structured around three steps: health and safety training, health and safety equipment supply and health and safety management," explains Farish. Through awareness creation and preparedness in the following three steps, companies are minimising their chances of experiencing catastrophic loss, should an emergency strike.

### **Step One: health and safety training**

As per the OSH Act and emergency management services stipulations, companies are required to ensure that their workforces are trained in the disciplines of fire-fighting, first-aid, evacuation and health and safety planning.

Farish points out that it is important to ensure that the trained health and safety team is evenly spread out across the organisation's building structure.

"Take for example a large organisation that is spread across ten building blocks. If there is a heart attack in building number eight, then it is of utmost importance that there is a person trained in first-aid in building number eight. There have been instances whereby all the first-aiders for the organisation are located in one building," says Farish.

He points out that it is best-practice to have a first-aider located within four to six minutes of any location within the organisation. "If someone suffers cardiac arrest, artificial ventilation should be administered within 4 to 6 minutes – if this doesn't happen, irreversible tissue damage to the brain can occur. It would be fortunate for professional assistance to arrive on the scene of an emergency within ten to twelve minutes – by this time it is too late. This is why it is so critical to have an even spread of first-aiders within an organisation," explains Farish.

In addition, it is important to carefully select staff for each role and to ensure that each health and safety team member is only trained in one of the disciplines.

"Very often we find that in haste to complete training requirements, organisations often train one person in first-aid, fighting and evacuation – only to find that during an emergency or drill, they can only fulfill one role. Have three people trained in separate disciplines, as opposed to one person in all three disciplines. It is important to spread these lifesaving skills across the workforce," says Farish.

### **Step Two: Health and Safety equipment**

With a trained health and safety team and workforce, an organisation needs to ensure that the legislative requirements with regards to emergency health and safety equipment are up to scratch.

"It is difficult for organisations to determine what they actually need according to the regulatory requirements, as it is quite complex and there is definite science behind it. Action Training Academy's specialist consultants often assist organisations with what equipment is necessary in order to comply with regulatory requirements," explains Farish.

The consultants review the premise size, production, and occupancy classification from which a detailed emergency evacuation plan is drafted and installed. Technicians then supply, install and maintain the fire-fighting equipment and health and safety equipment, which is outlined below:

- **First-aid boxes** – the *Regulation 7 first-aid kit* is the ideal kit that organisations should have on site, determined by the DOL and stipulate actual content of the kit.
- **Fire-fighting equipment** – the correct volume and quantities of the correct type of equipment is critical and legislated in various SABS regulations.
- **Emergency directional signage and planning** – to successfully evacuate and locate the emergency equipment, the organisation needs to have correctly planned and displayed directional signage and detailed evacuation plans.
- **Emergency evacuation drills** – organisations are required to carry out emergency evacuation drills bi-annually. The drill report should be kept on file in the event of any queries being raised by regulatory bodies/authorities.

Farish cites a recent emergency evacuation drill that Action Training Academy coordinated for a large organisation based in Johannesburg. The drill had to be carried out across ten buildings containing over 3 500 staff. Action Training Academy made use of simulation kits which created realistic scenarios. The organisation's health and safety team - consisting of numerous fire wardens, first-aiders and evacuation leaders - had the opportunity to practice their skills acquired through their health and safety training. Emergency Management Services as well as various other private emergency services were also on hand during the drill.

"Once the drill is complete, we compile a report for the organisation, which includes aspects such as problems encountered (e.g.: staff using lifts, not stairs), evacuation times and proposed methods of improvement. The organisation's health and safety committee then relays the feedback to management and staff," explains Farish.

"The DOL is increasing the number of inspectors in the field to monitor the health and safety activities of organisations. If an inspector finds that there has been loss of limb or life due to negligence, employees, management or the organisation could be liable to a heavy fine, imprisonment or both" explains Farish.

### **Step three: health and safety management**

The success of creating a healthy safe and prepared environment depends largely on senior management/executive buy-in as well as the establishment of a health and safety committee. The committee is the backbone of an organisations health and safety strategy.

The committee is made up of health and safety supervisors and representatives, who are required by law to meet a minimum of every three months. The formation of an effective health and safety committee will provide guidance on:

- Health and safety executive policy and statement
- Health and safety organograms (where the health and safety team is based within the organisation)
- Health and safety appointment letters (according to the act you have to appoint the health and safety team members).
- Health and safety check sheets
- Incident and accident and workmen's compensation commission correspondence
- General information

Action Training Academy's health and safety management solution is tailor-made to a fit into an organisation's brand and structure.

"Action Training Academy aims to assist organisations in preparing themselves for unplanned emergency crises. Our philosophy is to create awareness and preparedness and, in so doing, minimising risk and possible loss of property and more importantly life. Health and safety is not an option it is an obligation," concludes Farish.

***Ends***

**About Action Training**

Action Training Academy specialises in developing effective health and safety programmes, by offering health and safety training to businesses and their employees, thus providing them with valuable skills and information on procedures and the usage of emergency equipment. In addition, consultation with management to tailor-make health and safety management solutions will ensure a successful strategy/implementation.

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