

PRESS RELEASE

South African business managers are warned not to play with fire

Essential firefighting and fire-prevention courses that comply with stringent legislation are available locally to all businesses through Action Training Academy.

18 April, 2011: The implementation of fire-safety measures on-site is becoming increasingly-important for all businesses in South Africa, warns leading health and safety training and equipment provider Action Training Academy (ATA).

ATA Director **Alastair Farish** points out that the responsibility of implementing the minimum requirements of these measures is falling on the shoulders of senior management, owing to the fact that local fire authorities are often overburdened.

“Approximately 600 people die and over 4 000 are injured annually in South Africa as a result of fire, and these blazes cause more than R500-million damage to property every year,” he explains. “When faced with extraordinary situations, anything can happen. With proper training and education, the ability to make the right decisions in these extraordinary situations is essential.”

Farish notes that current legislation in South Africa requires that 1 in 50 people per company, or at least two people per building, are trained in basic firefighting. “The best method of stopping a fire is to prevent it,” he explains. “The actions taken to control a fire during the first few minutes will determine whether it can be contained or not. ATA’s firefighting training courses are aimed at teaching basic firefighting skills in order to minimise loss of life and property, by extinguishing fires in their early stages.”

Another aspect of fire safety legislation that many businesses are unaware of is the fact that the initial fire safety compliance status of a newly-built and ‘empty’ building becomes ineffective once the interior of the building is erected or altered.

“Once the internal structure of a building changes, it is commonly found that the minimum firefighting equipment is no longer adequate for fire fighting and protection throughout the building,” he explains. “For example, hoses that could reach across the interior of the building can no longer do so, because of partitions or doors preventing this. This is a significant problem and that is part of the reason why companies should use technical experts to assess fire risks to businesses.”

Farish notes that the building’s architect and the fire chief base the specifications for required equipment on national regulations and legislation. “Once a company has decided how it wants to use a building, it must submit a plan that specifies changes and addresses fire hazards, to its local fire department. The building must then be inspected and needs to be approved, based on the specific risks associated with the building or the type of work done in the building.”

What’s more, ATA training manager **Riaan Oberholzer** points out that fire marshals or health and safety team members are required by law to undertake monthly inspections of all firefighting equipment. “All fire fighting equipment pieces must also be serviced every year to comply with South African Bureau of

Standards (SABS) regulations, and evacuation drills have to be held every six months. Records of these activities also have to be kept.”

Oberholzer stresses the fact that if companies do not comply with these stringent measures, they may find themselves in the position where they are not eligible for insurance compensation, as they could legally be held accountable for the fire, due to negligence. “This is a significant risk for companies, as insurance providers are entitled by law to challenge any claims lodged in relation to fire damage, if it is discovered that the company is not compliant with any fire prevention and protection regulations.”

In order to ensure that there are more on-site fire fighters available to try avoid this from happening, Farish notes that ATA provides courses ranging from a 4-hour ‘General Fire Awareness’ course, to a 16-hour ‘Advanced Firefighting’ course.

ATA also provides health and safety training and conducts inspections of companies’ premises to advise on whether the minimum safety standards are being met. By training the health and safety committee personnel within every company, they oversee and manage the implementation of effective health and safety measures, fire-prevention and protection measures, adequate risk identification, safety signage and emergency equipment needs.

“As per accepted industry standards, ATA trains a minimum of one in 50 company employees in fire prevention and protection. We also provide companies with the required administrative documents and guidance and support, to ensure that fire prevention and protection measures are implemented correctly and in line with regulations,” Oberholzer continues.

What’s more, ATA inspects companies’ premises and produces a report using the Occupational Health and Safety Act regulations, as well as SABS regulations 0400 for fire protection based on building occupancy classification, 0139 for fire protection planning, including evacuation routes and staircases, and 1475 that deals with fire fighting equipment.

“Companies that implement our recommendations should comply with statutory requirements. In addition if we service their fire fighting equipment, may also issue a certificate of compliance with SABS 1475 regulations,” Farish concludes.

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Notes to the Editor

There are numerous photographs specific to this press release. Please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the Action Training Academy link.

About ATA International Training Division

ATA’s International Training Division (ITD) specialises in emergency medicine, occupational medicine, occupational hygiene, technical rescue, industrial fire-fighting, health and safety training courses for professionals operating in remote and isolated environments (e.g. oil and gas, mining, infrastructure and construction).

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