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HSE certification system introduced for the bituminous products industry

In its continuing initiative to ensure that the health and safety of workers is protected, and that environmental impacts of industrial processes is minimised, the Southern African Bitumen Association (Sabita) has introduced a certification scheme aimed at promoting global standards of health, safety and environmental conservation (HSE) in South Africa's bituminous products industry.

This latest move follows the introduction in 2007 of a HSE Charter, which commits Sabita members to the implementation of best available HSE techniques during the handling and application of bituminous products. The Charter underscores the internationally accepted principle that the ongoing improvement of mechanisms to ensure worker well being and conservation of the fragile environment is an obligation, not a choice.

Sabita CEO Trevor Distin said this week that the intention of the certification scheme was to encourage Sabita members and others in the bituminous products industry to further develop their own HSE initiatives by adopting those tools developed by Sabita to raise the level of safety awareness in the bituminous products industry.

"The benefits of the certification scheme are wide ranging," Distin said, "and include bottom-line gains such as participation in government tenders, the peace of mind linked to compliance with statutory requirements, and the future sustainability of the industry through protection of our people and environment."

He added that a parallel initiative was the introduction of a Bitumen Incident Reporting framework (Bitinrep) to develop a database of incidents/accidents affecting the health and safety of workers, and damage to the environment. This scheme was designed to raise awareness of potential hazards and to disseminate information that would allow members to learn from the mistakes of others.

"Both the certification and the incident reporting schemes will foster a climate in which HSE performance can be benchmarked and the re-occurrence of incidents can be avoided. These initiatives will also allow our industry to write and update specific codes of practice, and to develop specialised training material aimed at preventing the re-occurrence of damaging incidents," Distin said.

In terms of the certification scheme, all Sabita members will be sent a Pre-Audit Checklist (one for each established site or facility) which will assist them to identify and correct areas of non-conformance. The selected criteria are based on meeting the

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minimum requirements in terms of occupational health and safety legislation in line with Sabita's HSE Charter. These criteria will depend on the nature of the member's industrial activity.

In terms of the scheme a site is defined as a fixed facility where the processing or storage of bitumen takes place (such as a refinery, depot, emulsion plant, blending plant or asphalt mixing plant) and vehicles involved in the transportation or application of bituminous materials.

“Once these checklists have been returned to Sabita, we will notify an independent auditor to conduct an audit of the member's site or facility,” Distin said. “Sites will be allowed up to three months to correct any shortcomings noted by the auditor, who will then make a second audit, following which the member will be deemed either compliant or non-compliant.”

Sites which fully meet the minimum requirements will be issued with a certificate of compliance, will be allowed to use the logo and flag of Sabita's Centre for Occupational Safety, Health and Environmental Conservation (COSHEC) on company stationery, and their status as HSE certified companies will be published on the Sabita website,” Distin said. “These certificates will be valid for a period of 12 months from the date of issue, and the certification process must be repeated annually, with renewal of certification mandatory within three months of the anniversary date of the previous certificate issued.” He added that compliance criteria were dynamic and would change with time in step with revised circumstances and legislation. Part of the process would demand that Sabita keep members informed and up to date with the latest legal requirements and best practices in maintaining global standards of HSE.

“Sabita has developed appropriate tools and guidelines to assist members in achieving compliance and certification. These are available on the Sabita website www.sabita.co.za for downloading and ordering. The full Sabita HSE Charter is also available on the website.