

OHSAFROTEQ: AFMS GROUP EXPANDS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY OFFERING

[Afroteq Advisory](#), a subsidiary of the AFMS Group and one of South Africa's leading providers of integrated facilities management services and professional services in the built environment sector, has expanded its service offering in the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) sector by acquiring a division of OHS Africa. The new division is called OHSAfroteq and forms part of the company's strategic services that enable executive and senior managers to make informed and strategic decisions about their facilities environment.

A major milestone for the AFMS Group

"Over the past few years, we have identified that our clients (particularly those in the built environment sector) are experiencing a growing need for expert occupational health and safety advice. We are therefore very excited to be able to expand our existing Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS) that is aligned to ISO45001:2018 standards, into a fully-fledged, stand-alone division that is integrated with our Quality Management System (QMS) and operational practices and service agreements. Launching OHSAfroteq is a major milestone for our company and achieves an important strategic objective that we have been working towards for quite some time," says Andre Michau, a Director of Afroteq Advisory.

Growing need for OHS specialists

Broadly speaking, occupational health and safety workers are responsible for maintaining a safe working environment. It is therefore a function that sits comfortably within the scope of facilities management, as it enforces health and safety legislation, manages risk, focuses on improving employee productivity and reduces liability.

"In South Africa, as is the case in the rest of the world, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of new laws and regulations being introduced under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act) of 1993 which are aimed at safeguarding the rights, health and well-being of both the employer and employees. This Act has made it a legal requirement for all businesses to maintain health and safety in the workplace. However, the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that many South African companies and institutions fail to comply with this legislation," says Robert Palmer, Head of the new OHSAfroteq division.

According to Palmer, it is of vital importance for every company, organisation and school to have an approved, workable health and safety plan in place that protects its workers, staff, pupils or visitors entering its premises. To this end, the Department of Cooperative Government has just released a directives regulations in terms of the Disaster Management Act section 27(2) which is aligned with the OHS Act and regulations to ensure the health and safety of employees, visitors in the workplace.

This gazette clearly spell out the Occupational Health and Safety Measures (OHSM) that must be in place before workers are allowed to return to work as lockdown restrictions are eased. Failure to comply with the OHS Act or not having the required documentation in place, could result in Government forcing the company to close down, or costly personal injury litigation if employees or a member of the public contract the virus while on the premises. It could also cause serious reputational damage to a company if it is found to have been negligent.

Completing a COVID-19 risk assessment

The first step to ensure compliance with the OHS Act, is completing a preparedness audit and a detailed COVID-19 Risk Assessment. This involves an OHSAfroteq consultant visiting the site for an audit, during which several pertinent questions will be asked.

“Our job is to ensure ongoing compliance, identify potential hazards and mitigate possible risks. However, because we objectively inspect the premises from a facilities management perspective, we are also interested in saving our clients time, money and resources,” Palmer explains.

He adds that companies must be able to demonstrate to the inspector that they have the necessary paperwork, precautions and practical solutions in place to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading the virus. This includes introducing non-invasive screening mechanisms, creating isolation stations for pupils or workers that show possible signs of infection, ensuring that adequate and easily accessible sanitation stations are in place and developing a plan of action to ensure continued social distancing without compromising on efficiency or practicality.

Once a company, construction site or school opens its doors, it will be subject to an inspection by a departmental investigator who will inspect the premises to ensure compliance. Failure to meet these standards could result in serious consequences, such as hefty fines, imprisonment or both as well as closure of the facility.

Creating OHS champions in the workplace

Ensuring employee safety and wellbeing in offices, factories, building and construction sites, mines and schools has become non-negotiable in the world we live in today. There is no doubt that the need for trained and equipped professionals in this field will only increase in the months and years to come.

- To meet this need and allow prospective OHS managers to further their career paths by studying online, working at their own pace and from the comfort of their home, Afroteq Academy has made its Learning Programme in Generic Management: Disaster Risk Management (NQF Level 5) available online through the interactive [BraineBox](#) platform.
- OHSAfroteq will also be hosting a special webinar on Friday, 15 May 2020, during which it will offer advice to companies on how to ensure they are “COVID-19 ready” and compliant with new legislation. To register for this webinar, visit our website www.afroteq.co.za/ohsafroteq.

“Never before has the need for health and safety in the workplace been as prevalent as it is right now. Experts agree that this demand will only continue to increase as we face the possibility of more outbreaks, or prepare to contend with new dangers and threats facing us in the future. OHSAfroteq is passionate about equipping and empowering companies to face these challenges with confidence and with minimal disruption to their operations. This is the new normal, and we are ready for it!” Palmer concludes.

For more information, visit www.afroteq.co.za