



SAIOH News

Report from the SAIOH President and Council Members

SAIOH has had a busy time since the last issue of the Journal was published, particularly in terms of collaboration activities that are incorporated into the SAIOH Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the South African Department of Labour (DoL). To this end, SAIOH was asked by the DoL to review and provide professional inputs for the proposed Draft Ergonomics Regulations which had been issued for public comment until 27 April 2017.

SAIOH is grateful to all members who provided comments on the Draft Regulations, and is especially indebted to two members – Garth Hunter and Sean Chester – who selflessly and willingly went to great lengths, taking much effort and personal time, to provide their technical expertise in the form of an extensive review of the Draft Regulations, as well as the collation of comments received from other SAIOH members. In the true spirit of collaboration, SAIOH partnered with the South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Saiosh) and, together, the two organisations drafted and submitted a composite review report which had final oversight from both SAIOH and Saiosh Council members, before submission to the DoL. Collectively, SAIOH and Saiosh represent more than 10 000 registered occupational health, safety and hygiene professionals.

In summary, both SAIOH and Saiosh are supportive of additional control of physical ergonomic risk in the South African workplace. It is also noted that, through the drafting of ergonomic regulations, the DoL can be congratulated for taking a bold and positive step forward to achieve control of ergonomic risks. Nevertheless, the combined review of the draft DoL document has suggested that a more subtle approach should be taken. The report includes recommendations for changes to the current Draft Regulations for the DoL to consider, particularly in terms of the references made to 'Ergonomics Risk Assessment', 'Ergonomics Programme', 'Ergonomics Risk Factors' and 'Competent Person'.

The President and Council Members of SAIOH are pleased to announce that Hennie van der Westhuizen has been elected to SAIOH Council to manage the Technical Portfolio. As a certified occupational hygienist who recently retired from a long career in academia, Hennie has extensive experience and expertise in occupational hygiene, environmental health, safety, the management of academic programmes in occupational and environmental health, and research. We extend our congratulations to Hennie, on behalf of all SAIOH members.

In this issue of SAIOH News we include a refresher on the many benefits and advantages of being and/or becoming a SAIOH member.

Lastly, we take this opportunity to remind our members to please diarise the dates of the SAIOH Conference and Annual

General Meeting, 25 to 27 October 2017. The Conference will be held at a venue in the Cradle of Humankind in Gauteng; this year's theme is: "Occupational Hygiene: Building Bridges Beyond Borders".

SAIOH REFRESHER – "What is in it for me?"

Who are we and why we exist: Thinking beyond borders

Background

The debate regarding the criteria required for an individual professional to be qualified to practise occupational hygiene has been going on for years, globally. The South African setting is no exception, and this led to the formation of the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) by our founding members, in March 2000. The main SAIOH objective then was to provide the occupational hygiene profession with legal recognition, and protection and certification of its members, the occupational hygienists. The establishment of SAIOH was also brought about by the introduction of regulatory requirements mandating that individuals in the profession have additional training and certification. Over the past few years SAIOH has demonstrated that its certified members are competent, qualified and knowledgeable occupational hygiene professionals who add value to the systems and processes that ensure the protection of our workforces.

Since the establishment of the Institute, it has been shown that SAIOH is a credible organisation, by both local and international standards, and one that continues to contribute sustainably to the development and growth of the occupational hygiene profession. However, SAIOH has attracted its fair share of controversy over the years, among its members and detractors alike, leading to questions like, "What is in it for me?"

This question could have been posed as a result of many motives and grievances surrounding the occupational hygiene profession, but it is a genuine question, and one which is especially relevant to the members in good standing. SAIOH, as an organisation, subscribes to international certification schemes which have very high standards and abide by strict certification requirements and criteria. These strict standards and criteria are in place to ensure that the registration and certification processes are conducted correctly. Hence, members cannot be registered as being certified and competent occupational hygiene professionals if they do not meet all the requirements which include specific qualifications and experience, and knowledge of the local legislation governing occupational health and safety in South Africa.

But we digress from the question of interest, "What is in it for me?" As human beings, we tend to feel very confident in our abilities and capabilities, until our knowledge is tested. If we are to contribute meaningfully to our respective organisations, we must continue to develop and grow. There is an old adage that says "to thine own self be true"; therefore we need organisations that will help us develop clear career paths and maintain a system of professionalism. SAIOH is no exception; it is an organisation which undergoes

a peer review process, is recognised by its sister organisations, and is audited on various levels by the accreditation schemes such as the Skills Education Training Authority (SETA), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA). Hence, SAIOH is affiliated with local and international organisations to ensure ongoing quality control, and for SAIOH to remain objectively true to itself, its members, and the occupational hygiene profession as it is intended to be practised. Ultimately, being a member of SAIOH is an assurance to “thy own self, thy organisations, thy peers and thy profession”.

Back to our original question, “What is it in for me?” Here are some of the benefits of being a SAIOH member:

Profession protection

By now we believe that every member of the organisation knows that only SAIOH certified members are allowed to practise as occupational hygiene professionals. The organisation has continuously endeavoured to ensure that its professional members across southern Africa are recognised. Over the years, SAIOH has lobbied the regulatory authorities such as the Departments of Labour and Mineral Resources (DoL, DMR), on behalf of its certified members, to recognise and ensure that every person who practises occupational hygiene is certified by SAIOH to do so. This means that all organisations, including government, industry, corporate and state-owned enterprises, etc. may not employ non-certified members to perform occupational hygiene services. Thus, one of the main benefits of being a SAIOH member is that the profession is well protected from ‘fly-by-night’ service providers and from being hijacked by other professions.

At this time, SAIOH would like to pose the reverse question to its members: “How are you protecting your profession, and giving back to SAIOH?”

Our suggestions would be to acquire knowledge and expertise to be at the pinnacle and cutting edge of the occupational hygiene skills set. The ultimate goal of any academic institution is knowledge which is followed by certification. The SAIOH Professional Certification Committee (PCC) is the occupational hygiene skills-set custodian, continuously testing members’ knowledge to ensure they can be certified to practise occupational hygiene. John Fletcher stated, “deeds, not words shall speak”; hence, ensuring that correct processes are always followed is the most important tool we have to protect our profession. Consequently, a good working knowledge of the occupational hygiene discipline is the best multipurpose tool we have to certify us, market us, protect the profession and, in turn, protect SAIOH.

Remuneration

In most companies, registered members are recognised and remunerated as per their individual registration or certification categories. This process recognises individuals’ qualifications and levels of experience. In defining ‘occupational hygiene’, we often see words like “art and science of...” one needs not only the science but also the art of practising occupational hygiene.

There have been countless arguments and debates amongst practitioners who believe they should be handed occupational hygienist registration status without first being subjected to examination. One of the reasons is that the examination process tests both the science and the art required for the practice of occupational hygiene: education provides the science, and experience will provide the art. The registration categories are well-recognised during the certification process and, as a result, the registered occupational hygiene assistant (ROHA), the registered occupational hygiene technologist (ROHT), and the registered occupational hygienist (ROH), are remunerated in accordance with their registration level.

Enhancement of knowledge

SAIOH provides wide access to resourceful information such as case studies, presentations, regulatory updates, white papers and articles written by experts in many areas of interest in the broad field of occupational hygiene. As part of their SAIOH membership annual fees, members are afforded the added benefit of access to publications such as the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* journal (electronic and print versions), the *National Safety* magazine (electronic version), as well as newsletters issued at individual branch level.

SAIOH organises numerous events throughout the year that allow members to learn from their peers, as well as from local and international experts, in the form of annual scientific conferences, branch and discussion group meetings, and workshops. At these events, members are requested to share ideas, volunteer to be speakers, or become members of organising committees and/or other subgroups, such as technical committees. Being part of these associations and actively participating in such events and learning opportunities can only benefit members by exposing them to new ideas and knowledge updates across various interest areas, best practices, professional networking, and collaboration platforms, and brainstorming with peers practising in the occupational hygiene field. The added benefit is that members are rewarded for their participation in such learning events by being awarded points towards the fulfilment of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) requirements. Members are reminded that, as part of the ongoing certification process, they are required to keep their Personal Learning Portfolios (PLPs) current and up-to-date, including proof of activities for which CPD points are claimed. This helps the audit process and allows members to easily provide the required information if requested to do so.

Networking and mentorship

In any career, creating and sustaining professional relationships are very important processes; by joining SAIOH branch and discussion groups, members are presented with the best platforms for networking. These platforms can be used by members to support and help each another in attaining professional ambitions. During the annual scientific conferences

members have opportunities to network with their peers, as well as with local and international experts. Members are given ample opportunity to identify mentors in line with their professional needs, but the greatest benefit, and perhaps reward, is the opportunity for a member to volunteer to be a mentor. SAIOH offers a supported mentorship programme and guidance information is available to help both mentors and mentees. Member participation in fora, chat groups or discussion boards organised by the various SAIOH structures is also an ideal way to grow member networks, by using peers as sounding boards, and very often forging knowledgeable friendships along the way. Through these network and mentorship opportunities, most SAIOH members have met and befriended top achievers across various areas of expertise in the occupational hygiene profession.

Job opportunities and industry recognition

The number of university graduates has increased considerably, as more universities and other tertiary education institutions develop and offer occupational hygiene-related courses and/or degrees. Other study fields have been known to use the scarcity of certified occupational hygienists to their advantage. The Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) convened a recent meeting to address the issue of engineering graduates who find it difficult to secure employment due to the current economic climate. Many environmental health students are struggling to find placements in the public sector to carry out their community service work which is a pre-requisite for the completion of their studies. It is becoming increasingly difficult for graduates to find employment once they leave university. In the midst of these challenges, it is interesting to note that many companies use professional registration status as a means to short list candidates for posts, and students registered with SAIOH have been known to seize these job opportunities, even at entry level where it is known that job opportunities are especially limited. A professional certification with SAIOH provides a special benefit in terms of increasing chances of employment. SAIOH waives annual membership fees for up to one year after formal qualification for ROHA members who are unemployed.

International recognition

SAIOH enjoys a number of recognitions with international bodies such as IOHA which represents the global community of occupational hygienists and has its own National Accreditation Recognition Committee (NARC) of which SAIOH is a member, having had its certification schemes recognised by IOHA. SAIOH has signed MoUs with the following international organisations: the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), and the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH, USA), as well as with the national DoL. A number of certified SAIOH members practise occupational hygiene in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) member

states as well as in other African countries; this reciprocity comes as a result of assurances that these members are affiliated with SAIOH and in good standing in terms of their membership dues and their ongoing certification requirements.

Occupational hygiene practitioners who are certified by SAIOH are deemed to be qualified to do business or work in any country whose occupational hygiene association or certification body is affiliated with IOHA, the only international organisation looking after the interests of occupational hygiene worldwide.

Good governance

SAIOH has created structures to enhance good governance. These comprise a hybrid of different industry expertise, and diversity of specialisation and background. To mention a few examples, there are professors, technical experts and hygienists from both industry and academia, with postgraduate degrees and extensive experience and expertise.

To foster good governance, SAIOH members elect SAIOH Council members who are tasked with the management of the different portfolios. The PCC manages the certification processes; the Ethics Review Committee deals with ethics issues or complaints submitted to the Institute by either members of the public or SAIOH members, mainly with regard to the practices of certified members; and there are various technical committees. Currently, SAIOH employs two full-time administrators to look after the interests of its members.

SAIOH is a registered non-profit organisation that abides by sound financial management practices and is subjected to independent financial auditing systems. This financial responsibility function is headed by a capable vice president, supported by a chief administrator, and audited by an independent financial institution.

General membership benefits

- Special rates for SAIOH members at SAIOH events – a saving of up to R1500 in registration fees at the SAIOH Annual Conference alone
- Free regional, branch and discussion group meetings on a range of topics presented by experts in their fields
- Free subscription to *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, the peer-reviewed scientific journal (electronic and print versions of six issues per annum) which is the official journal of the four sister organisations in occupational health – SAIOH, South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN), and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA) – including access to the full archive of scientific papers
- Searchable online membership directory
- Regular e-mail alerts with institute and industry news, and important announcements
- *National Safety* magazine (electronic version) – keeping members up-to-date with industry activities and information presented in a less scientific way (layman's language)

- Personal access to the Members' Area of the website where you can view jobs, manage your profile, view publications, and more
- Access to networks of professionals to build and exchange expertise and knowledge
- CPD online submission
- Access to the member benefits of sister organisations in America (AIHA), UK (BOHS) and Australia (AIOH), when registered for these services at a preferential rate

Way forward

SAIOH is growing rapidly as an organisation, thanks to the work of the PCC which manages the certification process for the occupational hygiene profession. As a result, SAIOH Council has embarked on enhancing the branches by introducing regional structures. SAIOH Council realised that there were many challenges faced by the members and their organisations due to the centralised system currently in use. The main contributor to poor attendance at meetings and other events was found to be the cost of attending meetings (costs related to travel distance, company leave requests, and accommodation). The decentralised system will introduce the concept where SADC will be divided into three regions (Eastern (E), Central (C) and Western (W)), and regions will be further divided into branches and discussion groups (Figure 1). The branches will be formed according to the availability and proximity of members in a certain region. This proposed restructure will also encourage officials and representatives of key SAIOH stakeholders, such as DoL and DMR, to contribute to SAIOH meetings and events but, more importantly, it is envisaged that this restructure of SAIOH will be very supportive for the SAIOH mentorship programme, especially for university students. For more information, please refer to the presentation on the SAIOH regional structure on the SAIOH website.



Figure 1. Proposed SAIOH regions – implementation beyond borders

Conclusion

For the take-home message, SAIOH will borrow the famous words of John F Kennedy who said “Ask not what your country can do for you, rather ask what you can do for your country”. SAIOH is expanding its membership and developing and fostering the occupational hygiene profession at a fast rate. New branches are being established beyond South African borders, from Namibia to Botswana. The KwaZulu-Natal branch has adopted a new and innovative way of running and expanding that region to its best ever status in terms of occupational hygiene. The Western Cape branch and associated region is a force to be reckoned with, making use of novel approaches in their events and in their communication with members. The practitioners in Port Elizabeth have started a vibrant discussion group as a first proactive step in establishing a fully-fledged branch. The North West and Mpumalanga branches started this year on a high note, by appointing young and vibrant branch chairs. The Gauteng branch is contemplating the benefits and merits to its members of splitting into two branches (North and South Gauteng). Gauteng North will include Pretoria, Cullinan, Bronkhorstspuit and Centurion. Gauteng South will incorporate Johannesburg, Vaal, Springs, Heidelberg, Krugersdorp and Randfontein. Gauteng North will also incorporate academic institutions such as the University of Pretoria (UP), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), and Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). Gauteng South will have representation and mentor students from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), University of Johannesburg (UJ), and Vaal University of Technology (VUT).

SAIOH, as an organisation with numerous key stakeholders, is the ideal link between academic innovation and industrial application needs. SAIOH is well situated to enhance and facilitate collaboration efforts to ensure knowledge transfer into practical implementation. SAIOH is not for a few individuals only, and it is certainly not a proverbial ‘gentleman’s club’ – all members are welcome to contribute to, and participate in, SAIOH events and learning opportunities, irrespective of their certification or registration levels: “What can you do for SAIOH?”

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