



**Norman Khoza:**  
**2020 SAIOH**  
**president**

## SAIOH president's message

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## In this newsletter

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### SAIOH: SERVING OUR MEMBERS

- With a database of close to 900 members, SAIOH's communication channel is the perfect platform on which to advertise occupational hygiene and related jobs, workshops, symposia, and other events, as well as to share relevant information.
- SAIOH is planning its 1st Virtual Annual Conference later this year, to continue to provide a platform for learning, information sharing, networking, and development.
- Improvements and digitalisation are rapidly moving ahead within the PCC space, with regard to oral assessment methodology changes and online assessments.
- SAIOH continues to market the profession, most recently through preparing position papers on COVID-19 aspects, and subsequent media releases and a radio interview.

This is an unprecedented year indeed. We have come to recognise that the current 'new normal', as it is called, comes with many burdens. We have learned a few lessons about the adversities imposed on ordinary workers. The question is, what do we mean when we say work from home? Have we thought about schoolwork, data, and power supply (especially on the African continent)? People might be working from home, but it looks like people are working longer hours compared to previous working schedules. In this newsletter, we explore aspects of COVID-19, as well as the role of occupational hygiene in these trying times.

### CELEBRATED NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DAYS AND THEIR LINK TO THE CURRENT GLOBAL CRISIS

This year's World Youth Skills Day was celebrated on 15 July 2020 under the theme *Skills for a Resilient Youth in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond*. We must acknowledge that, this year, the celebration proceeded under particularly challenging circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures had resulted in the closure of educational institutions. The World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate that about 70% of the world's learners are currently affected by the school closures, and the majority might not catch-up. The question is, what can the southern African professional bodies do to accelerate skills development in Africa?

On 12 August 2020, the world celebrated International Youth Day under the theme *Youth Engagement for Global Action*. There is a need to highlight the importance of engaging young people at local, national, regional, and global levels to enrich multilateral institutions. The theme of the Day resonated well with that of

International Nelson Mandela Day on 18 July 2020, which was *Take Action, Inspire Change and Make Everyday a Mandela Day*. On 9 August, South Africa celebrated National Women's Day in commemoration of the approximately 20 000 woman of 1956 who submitted a petition against the pass laws. Interestingly, all the above events resonate with the important UN international day, World Humanitarian Day (19 August), that pays tribute to aid workers who risk their lives in humanitarian service and support people affected by crises around the world.

We are in the midst of a catastrophic crisis. It's visible in the high rate of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa, the world grappling with the scourge of COVID-19, people losing their jobs, Ebola and bubonic plague outbreaks, the Black Lives Matter movement, the increasing number of farm murders in South Africa, crumbling economies, and psychosocial issues. If I put myself in the shoes of someone who is categorised as COVID-19 high-risk – being 60 years or older and/or living with one or more chronic condition/s – it is a frightening thought. What does work from home mean? What if my job does not allow me to work from home? The biggest crises I have ever come across are workplace inequalities and prejudices, and the current crises add to this.

### THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENISTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

What is the role of an occupational hygienist in COVID-19 and other public emergencies, such as Ebola and tuberculosis? Workplace hazards may include pathogen exposure, long working hours, psychological stress, ergonomic hazards, fatigue, burnout, stigma, and physical and psychological violence and harassment.<sup>1</sup> Occupational

hygiene is a discipline of anticipation, recognition, evaluation and control.<sup>2</sup> The first and foremost responsibility of the occupational hygiene professional is the prevention by means of exposure control, through a comprehensive understanding of occupational hazards, whether biological, physical, chemical, ergonomic or psychosocial, and the link between health and safety. Occupational hygiene professionals are trained to identify and understand hazards in the workplace, and to institute efficient and cost-effective control measures. A comprehensive understanding is needed of the causes of occupational hazards, sources and exposure paths, modes of transmission, routes of exposure or entry into the human body, doses, target organs, and the means and ways of breaking the chain that results in worker exposure. The first points of departure are the health risk assessment, workplace monitoring or analysis, and institution of sector- and activity-specific control measures.

In the case of SARS-CoV-2, occupational hygiene professionals carefully consider the conventional hierarchy of controls, i.e. containment/isolation of the risk factor, use of engineering measures that promote proper ventilation of rooms, characterisation of the procedures and organisational measures, and the use of suitable personal protective equipment (PPE).<sup>3,4</sup> Appropriate selection of efficient and cost-effective controls is the art and science of the profession. This process includes a comprehensive understanding of the workplace processes, the workforce and its limitations, the raw materials used and the by-products, respirator fit testing, and hazard limitations. The SARS-CoV-2 virus can remain viable on surfaces for up to 72 hours; therefore, there is no need to disinfect a work area that has been locked for an extended period. Occupational hygienists can assist workplaces to select proper respirators with correctly assigned protection factors (APFs), using scientifically based methodology to calculate the correct APF of the respirator.

### THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

What can we learn from COVID-19 cases and deaths in South Africa? Approximately 79% of those who died with COVID-19, as of 29 June 2020, were older than 60 years.<sup>5</sup> We use the word 'with' due to the nature of the available statistics. Globally, statistics indicate that people older than 60 years are at an increased risk of dying from COVID-19. About 24% of those who have succumbed to the infection are aged 50–59 years; this group should also take extra precautionary measures. About 56% of those who have died with COVID-19 were suffering from comorbidities (mainly diabetes and hypertension).<sup>6</sup> This is not surprising, considering that the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 9.8% of all deaths in South Africa in 2016 were attributed to diabetes (7.7% of males and 11.8% of females).<sup>7</sup> More recent studies have reported a prevalence of diabetes of 12.7% in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> The problem is that there are many people who are not aware that they have diabetes. Approximately 52.5% of those who have died with COVID-19 were male, females accounted for about 47.4%.<sup>5</sup> There is no statistically significant difference in the proportion of deaths between males and females; we are all in this 'war' together.

There is a need to think about the exposome, which is a measure of exposures in an individual's lifetime, and how it relates to health.<sup>9</sup> Exposure begins before birth and continues for a lifetime. No country wants a situation where future generations will

be denied work due to diseases or conditions that could have been prevented and/or eradicated. The occupational hygiene profession must influence work policies to respond to current challenges. What does it mean when workplace policies state that workers older than 60 years or those with chronic diseases should work from home? What about those who are unable to work from home? The best strategy is collective safety management to ensure that everyone is safe in and outside of the work environment.

### PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION COMMITTEE (PCC) AND COUNCIL CHANGES

We extend a warm welcome and congratulations to Mr Andrew Dickson, the new PCC vice-chair. Andrew graduated from Wits University with a Bachelor of Science degree (Natural Sciences) in 1991 and completed his national service training before spending a year overseas. Following his return in 1995, he joined Geozone Environmental (then Hindoc) as an intern/assistant and was bitten by the occupational hygiene bug. From 1997 to 1999, he completed the British Occupational Hygiene Board Exam, and was awarded a Diploma on Professional Competence in Occupational Hygiene (cum laude) from the British Institute of Occupational Hygienists (BIOH) in November 2000. He is a registered occupational hygienist (ROH) with SAIOH and has been working for Geozone Environmental Pty (Ltd) for more than 20 years, as an occupational hygiene consultant, gradually moving up to his current position as technical manager: occupational hygiene. Andrew was always keen to find a way to give something back to the profession and joined the Professional Certification Committee (PCC) in the early 2000s. He has served as a member and lead assessor, and member of the PCC and the Examination Committee, ever since.



**Andrew Dickson**  
Photograph: SAIOH



**Naadiya Mundy and her husband, Calvin Mundy**  
Photograph: SAIOH

We congratulate Ms Naadiya Mundy (previously Nadasen) on her marriage. The wedding took place on 4 July 2020. Naadiya was elected on to the SAIOH National Council during last year's AGM, which took place at the African Pride Mount Grace Resort. Naadiya commented that she and her husband had a relaxed and good day celebrating with only their families. She wore her mother's wedding dress which is now 47 years old. We wish Naadiya and her husband a long and happy life together, full of joy and happiness.

## MEDIA RELEASE AND POSITION PAPERS

Mr Deon Swanepoel, the SAIOH Council member responsible for the Technical Portfolio, had an informative interview with Radio Sonder Grense (*Spektrum*), a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Afrikaans radio station, on the topic of SARS-CoV-2 aerosol transmission. A big thank you to our general manager, Deon Jansen van Vuuren, who organised the interview, and Deon Swanepoel for drafting the position paper used in the interview. This was the second position paper released in less than a month. The first one was on disinfectant tunnels. These two position papers were preceded by a media release on the role of the occupational hygiene practitioner during the COVID-19 pandemic and during return to work. We give special thanks to Prof. Cas Badenhorst and Mr Sean Chester who came up with the initial idea, and especially to Sean for drafting the media release statement. We encourage our members to read these informative documents, which can be found at <https://www.saioh.co.za/page/Resources> on the SAIOH website.

To listen to the interview, please visit the SAIOH website. The media release and position papers were circulated by Mailchimp to all SAIOH members and stakeholders and are also available on the SAIOH website. Many thanks to the SAIOH administrative team

for a job well done in placing the occupational hygiene profession and SAIOH on the map.

## PCC UPDATES

The SAIOH PCC written assessments took place nationally, on Friday 26 June 2020, with candidates writing their assessments at nominated venues. This method posed numerous challenges to the candidates and the PCC administrative team. We would like to thank candidates and their invigilators for ensuring fair procedures and maintaining integrity.

The SAIOH PCC team has again met with the information and communication technology company that is developing our assessments electronically. We wish to notify all future candidates that, starting from 11 September 2020, all assessments will be electronic.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

The SAIOH Council invites your feedback on how this communication is helping you as a SAIOH member and how we can improve. If you have any suggestions, inputs, or contributions, please e-mail them to our president at [president@saioh.co.za](mailto:president@saioh.co.za) for consideration.

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