

Health and Safety Issues to get right

There are lots of resources out there on the internet to guide schools in ensuring that the school environment is a safe and healthy one.

At the recent **NOSA workshop** I attended, the following practical issues were brought to light.

Fire extinguishers:

Ensure you have the correct ones for the type of fire that might be expected in the area of the extinguisher.

Extinguishers **MUST** be wall-mounted with signs showing where they are. They are not allowed to stand on the floor.

Fire Escapes

These cannot be used as store rooms. They must remain clear at all times.

In boarding establishments, fire escapes must be accessible. Schools cannot use the excuse that learners keep getting out if they are not securely locked in at night. It is possible to keep the doors locked with keys in a key box which must be broken to get the keys, or on a fire alarm switch so if the doors are opened an alarm is activated, or under camera surveillance.

Science laboratories

The storage of chemicals appears not to be understood by many schools. The following is required:

Chemicals must be stored in a locked storage facility, preferably a storage room, however, in many schools this is not possible, so chemicals are stored in locked steel cupboards.

Acids and bases must be stored on separate

shelves and shelves should be lipped so that any spills cannot drip from one shelf to the next.

A fire extinguisher must be available in or next to the storage facility.

The storage facility must be ventilated / vented.

Chemicals must be stored on shelves – they may NOT be stored on the floor.

Ensure shelves have the correct load capacity for the weight of the chemicals.

The storage facility can never be left unlocked and unattended.

Health and Safety Audits

As a first step on the ladder to health and safety awareness in your school, conduct your own health and safety audit before the end of the school year and get the problems fixed. Keep these documents on file as proof of your commitment to a safe and healthy school environment. An example of a health and safety audit is available from me on request.

Umalusi registration

It is a legal requirement for independent schools to register with Umalusi and to become accredited. The new act will not allow schools to be registered by the department of education if they have not registered with Umalusi.

The first step in the process is registering a letter of intent with Umalusi. You can contact the Manager of the School Evaluation and Accreditation Unit, Faith Ramotlale at Faith@umalusi.org.za for the information.

If you are in the Cape Town area, I will be happy to drop off the forms for you. Contact me.