

Safety in the workplace made easier

A short safety course for your staff could mean the difference between life and death while waiting for emergency services to arrive on the scene.



Life-threatening emergency situations in working environments can be dealt with quickly and efficiently by staff members on-site, thanks to a range of tailor-made courses developed by leading occupational health and safety expert, Action Training Academy (ATA).

The company, which employs fully-qualified and experienced fire-fighters and paramedics as trainers, provides business and personal training to industries ranging from mining to corporate, from five dedicated training centres located across South Africa.

From its humble beginnings in KwaZulu-Natal 10 years ago, the company has rapidly expanded to become South Africa's premium provider of a wide range of safety courses that include occupational health and safety (OHS), first aid, paramedic and fire fighting.

Director of inland branches Alastair Farish, an advanced life support paramedic with more than 18 years experience, notes that ATA recognised a gap in the market when OHS was made a legislatively compliant criterion by the Department of Labour.

The importance of OHS

"OHS is core to the successful long-term sustainability of any business, and the need for people trained in this field is growing every day. Today, employers have a responsibility to protect the people within the workplace. The OHS training that we offer provides employees in all sectors of the economy with the knowledge and skills to identify, handle and manage potentially-hazardous situations," he explains.

The company offers eight separate health and safety courses, ranging from the 4-hour 'Basic Health and Safety Induction' course, which covers basic fundamentals, to the Health and Welfare (HWSETA) accredited 10-day 'Safety Officer' course. The latter is designed to equip potential safety officers with the essential systems and tools that can enable them to manage a career successfully in the field of OHS.

Farish points out that ATA is the only training centre in South Africa to be accredited by the British Safety Council (BSC).

The course is developed to meet the health and safety needs of line managers, supervisors, team leaders, heads-of-department and junior managers. The training course gives participants a theoretical and practical understanding of health and safety, and how it can be applied successfully within the workplace.

"This means that in addition to our SETA-accredited Safety Officer certificate, all competent candidates will receive a BSC certificate in 'Level 2 Supervising Staff Safely', which is internationally recognised. This is a giant leap for our health and safety programmes, and we are excited about the future, and what the relationship with the BSC holds," says Farish.

A critical shortage

Action Training Academy director of coastal branches, Andre Lotz, notes that there is a critical shortage of trained and experienced health and safety professionals in South Africa, and the demand is increasing as safety legislation becomes increasingly-important.

He points out that South African law requires that at least 1 in every 50 people per company or building be trained in first aid. To meet this increasing demand, the company provides a number of first-aid training courses, ranging from level 1 to 3.

"Emergency first-aid is an invaluable skill for both the workplace and the domestic environment. People who attend these courses are not only provided with information on the practical handling of a medical emergency, but also on the first aid kit that should be kept close to hand," Lotz explains.

Farish points out that more than 600 people die annually in South Africa as a result of fire, and that these blazes cause more than R500 million damage to property every year. In order to ensure that there are more on-site fire safety experts available to reduce this statistic, Action Training provides courses ranging from 'General Fire Awareness' to 'Advanced Fire fighting'.

Don't just stop it - prevent it in the first place

"Legislation requires that at least 1 in 50 people per building should be trained in basic fire fighting. Action Training's fire fighting training courses are aimed at teaching basic fire fighting skills in order to minimise loss of life and property, by extinguishing fires in their early stages. The best method of stopping a fire is to prevent it," he explains. "The actions taken to control a fire during the first few minutes will determine whether it can be contained or not."

What's more, Lotz notes that the company also provides dedicated paramedic training courses. He says: "One of our core specialities and strengths is emergency medical care training. This process starts with basic first-aid training and progresses to entry level paramedic and emergency services training."

In addition to providing potentially life-saving training courses, Action Training also provides corporate OHS management solutions. The service involves a simple seven-step process that includes:

- OHS assessment
- OHS system implementation
- OHS training
- Equipment supply and compliance
- Emergency and evacuation planning
- Evaluation, review and approval
- Detailed risk-assessment

Farish points out that OHS is a core and integral element in driving the academy forward, and stresses the importance of organisations being compliant with the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993.

He does; however, admit that businesses can be put off by what seems to be a daunting task. "Compliance may seem to be

an uphill struggle with all the listed requirements; however, many businesses do not realise that they may already be compliant with a number of OHS requirements. Our objective is to assist organisations in planning OHS system implementation and procedures, and to ensure that continuous compliance is made as easy as possible," Farish concludes.

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