



NATURE BOY: iKapa Honorary Ranger Ruedi Siegenthaler was awarded the prestigious Merit Award at the Honorary Ranger Indaba held recently at Berg en Dal in the Kruger National Park. The honorary rangers, of which Siegenthaler has been a member of for the last five years, are volunteers who provide a dynamic and practical support structure to SANParks operating in Table Mountain National Park and 23 other national parks in the country. Siegenthaler was a founding member of iKapa in 2005 and is described as an inspiration and mentor to people involved with the group. Here Siegenthaler receives his award from Jansen Davies, chairperson of the Honorary Rangers. Photo: Supplied

Construction deaths: who is responsible?

TANYA PETERSEN

CONSTRUCTION workers are two to three times more likely to die on the job than workers in other industries. With the recent spate of construction-related accidents in the Western Cape, many are wondering who is to blame.

On Thursday morning, three construction labourers working on Faircape's construction site in Woodstock were seriously injured when a scaffolding crashed down on them.

Less than two months ago, on the same site, a concrete slab collapsed on five construction workers. Three of the workers managed to escape unharmed, but it took over three hours retrieve the bodies of the other two.

Tibor Szana, acting chief inspector of the Department of Labour, says that it is important for employers not to take shortcuts.

"All workers must be trained to do the work which they are required to do. Deaths and incidents do not happen by accident. It really is a series of acts or omissions over time - which is not necessarily a long time either."

He explains that liability can only be established after all evidence has been evaluated.

"The inspector will then make a recommendation to the office of the National Prosecuting Authority as to whether there was a contravention of any legislation in terms of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations."

He explains that a number of people can be found liable for the incident, based on the findings of the investigation.

According to Mumtaz Kajie, an attorney at De Vries Shields Chiat, if an employee is injured or killed on duty, the employee or the family cannot sue the employer.

She explains that there are procedures which must be followed. The employee - or in case of death, the family members of the employee - would need to consult a medical doctor for an examination. The results are sent to the employer, who sends it to the labour department, who then reviews it in terms of the Compensation of Occupational and Diseases Act (COIDA) of 1993.

She explains that depending on the injuries, COIDA will compensate the employee or their family. However, she says that in nine out of ten cases, COIDA will only cover the medical expenses.

Occupational health and safety experts say fatalities and injuries on construction sites

are nothing new in South Africa, but why they continue to occur on such a large scale despite the regulations of the OHSA, they say, is a question worth examination.

Professor Theo Haupt, an internationally-acclaimed construction health and safety specialist, says poor health and safety performance in construction is due to a lack of management commitment and involvement, poor levels and quality of supervision, and inadequate health and safety training of construction workers.

"Health and safety is not seen as a value or human right by SA construction firms and practitioners," says Haupt.

He claims the SA construction sector has the third highest frequency rate for fatalities, with mining first, followed by fishing. A national construction inspection report conducted in August last year shows that 53% of the 1 415 construction sites visited by the Department of Labour were non-compliant when it came to health and safety.

In the Western Cape, 107 sites were inspected, of which 70 fell short of the requirements. Between April 2006 and February 2007 there were a total of 131 fatalities and 195 non-fatal injuries on construction sites.

"Construction clients are ultimately responsible for the contractors that they award projects to," says Haupt.

He says there is a need for full-time health and safety officers to be appointed on all construction sites.

"This particular person should be appropriately trained. This appointment should continue for the full duration of the project until the final handover of the completed facility."

A health and safety officer working for a Cape-Town-based health and safety consultancy, who asked that her name be withheld, says most of the health and safety officers have not had formal training. However, she says that most of the officers are "quite competent". The source explains that health and safety is the new buzz phrase on construction sites, but that there are still a number of sites that know nothing about health and safety.

"The main thing is the employer wants to get the work done quickly. They use cheap materials and unskilled labour."

Haupt explains that to prevent accidents from occurring on construction sites, clients should ensure that the contractors they employ have a good health and safety track-record.

Game on for alliance

POLITICS

Marais may be back in the running

BARBARA MEYER

SMALL political parties, with Christianity as a common denominator, have decided to band together in a bid to oppose the African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) in the national elections in April 2009.

Kevin Southgate, the chairperson of the Steenberg Community Police Forum, along with ex-mayor Peter Marais, could be in the running for next year's general elections.

The Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), an alliance of the New Labour Party, the Federation of Democrats (FD), the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) and the Alliance for Community Transformation (ACT) presented their Christian Charter to parliament on Wednesday.

According to the charter, the alliance is pro the death penalty, pro-life and against same-sex marriages.

Marais, the former mayor of Cape Town and later premier of Western Cape Province, says he returned to politics only two months ago after a long break, in the role of the CDA's national spokesperson.

Louis Green, the leader of the Federation of Democrats and the former deputy president of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), says that the ACDP was formally invited to join the CDA, but he says the offer was declined because the ACDP already has an alliance with the DA.

Green says that while he can only speak as the leader of the FD, he says that Marais and Southgate will be playing a prominent role in the CDA in the up-coming elections, on both a provincial and possibly at a national level. Green says that he will be running for parliament at a nation-

al level.

However, Marais says the leaders of the CDA needed to sit down to discuss what role each will play in the elections and in which province. He says they are currently negotiating with additional political parties in other provinces to join the alliance. He says that with only nine months to go before the next elections, the CDA could start actively campaigning by the end of the year. Marais says that Southgate is currently acting as the secretary of the alliance at a national level.

Southgate says that he will be making himself available as a candidate in next year's general election, should the party so request.

"Our communities need public representatives who care and who do not only serve because it is politically expedient for them to do so," says Southgate.

When asked if he would be standing down from his position as chairperson and executive member of the CPF, Southgate says that even while he was a member of parliament, he served as the CPF chairperson.

"I remained objective and never allowed the CPF to become a political battleground. As a result, I was repeatedly asked by people to make myself available for CPF elections. When I didn't return to public office, my commitment to serve people, and especially my community, has remained resolute. My involvement attests to that. It was never and will never be about a position," he says.

DA Councillor Gerald Morkel of Ward 68, and the former mayor of Cape Town, says he was surprised when he heard about the development of the CDA. He says he did not believe there was a place for small parties or splinter groups. "You already have the ACDP, and now you will have two little parties," says Morkel.

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