

Guest editor's column...



Sibongiseni Myeni,
Guest Editor

Occupational hygiene in southern Africa has come of age! In 'The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership', John Maxwell states that a leader's lasting value is measured by succession. It is clear to me that the occupational hygiene profession in southern Africa would not be celebrating 25 years of existence if we did not have leaders who believed in the law of legacy. As we celebrate our past achievements we look back and realize that the development, growth and strength of occupational hygiene in southern Africa would not have been sustainable without the support from highly committed and dedicated occupational health colleagues like occupational health doctors, occupational health nurses, as well as occupational safety practitioners to mention a few. The great appreciation of SAIOH goes to individual societies that continue to politically and academically advance the agenda of occupational health in southern Africa: SASOM, MMOA, SASOHN, IOSM, MVSSA and SAPEMA as well as other societies, we salute you all.

In his article on the history of occupational hygiene in southern Africa, the immediate Past President of the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH), Deon Jansen van Vuuren gives us a clear perspective of the rich history of occupational hygiene as a profession in southern Africa. It is quite enriching to understand where the profession comes from and the dedication and commitment of individuals that went into it.

Talk about ionizing radiation and you initiate an ongoing debate about the good and bad of it. You raise emotions about the possibility of cancer and you instantly initiate a vibrant debate on how important ionizing radiation is in technological advancement and development. This topic becomes even more important in medical settings where X-rays are utilized as diagnostic tools with the aim of saving lives through early detection of medical conditions. In his article, Don Emby urges medical professionals to exercise caution and always be alert regarding the use of ionizing radiation. He warns of the potential of ionizing radiation to cause cancer. Furthermore, he discusses the consequences of inappropriate use of radiation as well as the new developments in the field of radiology. This is an important aspect for occupational hygiene professionals, which should not be overlooked, especially when it comes to risk identification, assessments and recommendations on risk management.

One of the most important occupational hygiene physical stressors in many work environments is heat. In this issue, Darren Joubert and Graham Bates present some recent developments in the area of occupational heat stress, heat illness and the human physiological response. They take us through physiological responses to heat exposure, such as sweat rates, electrolyte loss and the effects of dehydration. In the second part, they discuss the measurement of heat stress and describe a new heat stress index that has been developed in Australia.

In his letter to the Editor, Leslie London highlights the importance of fluorescent tracers as a tool for research,

exposure control and training. He emphasises that here we have methods that have considerable potential to contribute to the control of pesticides hazards in agriculture in developing countries, like South Africa in particular and Africa as a whole. As occupational hygiene professionals may well be aware, this is of significant importance when it comes to occupational hygiene practice.

As we enter into the next 25 years of occupational hygiene practice in southern Africa, the profession is faced with new challenges that need new approaches. Despite our past and current good contribution to the wellbeing of employees, we need to ask ourselves some hard questions which may give us some painful answers. We need to have the discipline to confront the brutal facts about our current reality concerning our contribution towards occupational health programmes as well as a healthy workforce and society. To what extent do we add value to business? To what extent do we influence occupational health/hygiene legislation? To what extent do we influence occupational hygiene / health policies at our work environments? John Maxwell says that the true measure of leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less. What is the measure of our occupational hygiene leadership as professionals? To what extent do we contribute to prevention of illness by offering sound occupational hygiene recommendations? How and to what extent do we follow up on the recommendations that we offer? In his book, 'Good To Great', Jim Collins says good is the enemy of great. We can no longer settle for a good in the field of occupational hygiene. This calls for occupational hygiene professionals to continuously develop their skills and keep current with trends in the field. If we understand that today matters and that yesterday ended last night, we cannot stand still and forever celebrate our past achievements at the expense of continuous growth.

Occupational hygiene professionals are increasingly expected and required to play prominent and meaningful roles in project design studies and project risk management. Occupational hygiene professionals are expected and required to anticipate occupational health issues before the handover and commissioning of projects. This will go a long way insofar as business cost saving is concerned. It is easy and cheaper to handle and deal with occupational hygiene hazards at the design stage of a project than after commissioning. After all, the aim of occupational hygiene is control of employee exposure to health hazards. This is where occupational hygiene will add value to businesses and employee wellness. As occupational hygiene is not just about identifying problems but also providing solutions, the interface between occupational hygiene professionals and engineering professionals cannot be overemphasised.

I wish SAIOH many more successful years of occupational hygiene service and may the co-operation amongst OH & S societies continue.

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