

South Africa – occupational health in the non-mining industry: from 1976 to the post-COVID era

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Occupational health in the non-mining sector became an entity recognised by the South African Government in 1976. The Erasmus Commission of Enquiry (1976) into occupational health, followed by the 1979 Wiehahn Commission Report on the Industrial Relations System in South Africa, identified specific legal challenges to be addressed. After nearly 20 years, the Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act No. 85 of 1993) defined in legal terms the occupational health services that would be required. However, much earlier than 1985, non-governmental organisations became pioneers in occupational health.

The South African Society of Industrial Health, constituted in 1948, underwent various changes and was renamed the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) in 1985. SASOM, an affiliate member of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), is tasked with promoting, protecting, and enhancing the quality of life and wellbeing of the working population of South Africa. Its members are medical practitioners registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

In 1966, the Industrial Nurses of the Southern Transvaal met for the first time; during 1976 they changed their name to 'occupational health nurses' to be in line with international standards at that time. Since 1980, the organisation has been known as the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN); its main mandates are promoting occupational health nursing through accredited standards of practice, education, and training, and co-operation with national and international organisations.

Occupational hygiene as a recognised discipline came into existence in 1992, at a meeting of the transitional committee of the then Institute of Occupational Hygienists of Southern Africa (IOHSA). At a strategic meeting in 2000, the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) was launched; it is the officially recognised and accredited professional organisation responsible for the certification and registration of occupational hygiene professionals in southern Africa.



International Commission on Occupational Health

Founded in 1906 as Permanent Commission