

**Press Release:**

***Standing firm on safety and quality – Vital Engineering uncompromising when it comes to product standards***

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While many steel fabricators in South Africa face an ongoing challenge of competing with lower prices in the international market, Vital Engineering continues to be resolute in its approach of putting quality and safety considerations ahead of price advantage.

The company is passionate in its practice of using local skills and products in support of the South African economy, despite the trend of companies seeking lower prices from suppliers overseas.

“Currently South African steel prices are disproportionately higher than most international markets, and this is a major concern for fabricators. However, Vital Engineering is competitive in our field of expertise, having kept our operations ‘lean and mean’ during previous volatile economic cycles,” says Dodds Pringle, Managing Director of Vital Engineering.

Despite the fact that input costs can be as much as 20% higher than competitors overseas - given escalating demands for higher wages, a fluctuating currency and rising hidden costs such as electricity, rates and taxes - Vital Engineering has managed to retain its reputation as a leader in the manufacture of pressed flooring, stair treads, gratings and safety handrails.

“Our in-house export department keeps us up-to-date with international pricing trends, and we constantly endeavour to improve our fabrication costs to retain export markets,” says Pringle.

“We believe that the quality and ‘value-add’ that we offer our clients leads to exceptionally low ‘cost of installation’. We have also mastered the art of revisions ‘on the fly’ – as is often necessary in construction. Our input materials, while of a higher cost, are standard 350WA material which offers greater strength than those in a commercial grade material.”

Vital Engineering manufactures in both steel and fibreglass, maintaining that both materials offer a competitive advantage that is project cost-driven. While steel offers more strength than synthetic products, fibreglass offers a lower serviceable product which reduces the maintenance cycle considerably, according to Pringle.

“Because steel is stronger, less steelwork is required in the supports of the steel gratings than its synthetic counterparts. In addition, it is a relatively ‘green’ product in that it can be recycled,” Pringle points out.

“While steel has its place in our product range, so does fibreglass. In certain instances, fibreglass can offer better value for money than higher-priced austenitic materials.

“We identified some years ago through careful assessment of replacement cycle times of mines, power generation, food and beverage and port handling facilities, that fibreglass (GRP or FRP) offered longer maintenance and replacement cycles. This enables clients to use their capital expenditure on other areas of the plant.”

Tough economic conditions and an intensified focus on safety issues on many production sites has meant that Vital Engineering is continuously seeking ways in which to offer its clients

improved value for money without compromising on quality. The company has spent a considerable time on research and development (R&D) as a result.

“We have some exciting new products that we will be launching in the next few months, which we are confident will add even greater value savings to our clients,” says Pringle.

One of the company’s latest offerings is its ‘Econotread’ stair tread. This offers clients a saving of up to 10% in mass, and therefore in price. The range also offers more superior front-loading than is offered by conventional stair treads, eliminating the need to replace bent or dished stair treads on site - which can be a very costly and time consuming exercise.

“We have also increased the thickness of our side plates to 6mm, to retain the rigidity and strength of the treads under load,” notes Pringle. “This has made a marked difference, considering the number of treads on a typical construction site which no longer need replacing.”

Despite the rising input costs of steel manufacture in South Africa, Vital Engineering remains committed to sustainability in the industry by refusing to compromise on a quality output, and retaining safety as its focus.

The company is proud to be the first gratings, hand railing and expanded metal manufacturer to obtain an international ISO 9001 design accreditation, and to have held this certification for over 19 years.

Vital Engineering’s products are all branded, so that clients are guaranteed to receive the products they have specified. “However, we are determined not to become complacent or reliant on our brand name and reputation, but to constantly improve wherever possible,” says Pringle.

“As leaders in this industry, we are seeing a decline in local project investment, and this has obvious roll-on effects on our construction clients, and ultimately the industry in general,” he continues.

“We have also noted a few smaller manufacturers entering the market, which is concerning because lower quality material is being used to fabricate these products. If buyers of these products are looking to price advantage rather than quality and safety, this can have disastrous results and can lead to massive insurance claims.”

Lower grade products can also have a springy or ‘trampoline’ effect when installed which can cause safety issues, according to Pringle. In addition, certain imports are not subject to the same stringent inspection criteria as domestic products.

“At the end of the day, our clients can be assured that Vital Engineering will continue to strive to find the most economic solutions which deliver optimum quality and value in the long term. This is our commitment to the market,” Pringle concludes.

***Ends***

***(903 words)***

#### **Note to Editors**

Since 1939 Angus McLeod and Vital Engineering have established a reputation for quality and service in the manufacture of all types of gratings, stair treads, pressed floors and safety

handrails. Its brand names of Vitagrid and Maclock have become synonymous with versatility, quality and service.

The Group offers a wealth of product expertise and has been involved in the supply to power plants, petrochemical plants, materials handling projects, mining, process plants, food, beverage as well as most facets of the civil and structural engineering industries, both domestically and internationally.

A variety of products and materials for numerous applications are readily available, when either costs or corrosion are factors. The range includes bitumen dipped, galvanised (610g/m<sup>2</sup>) and mild steel. Other grades of materials such as SS304, SS316, structural grade aluminium and 3CR12 can also be manufactured.

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