

Press release from Jan de Beer, cell 082 456 3677:

New Board Calls For Industrial Unity To Safeguard Skills Funds

The newly-established Professional Board for the Master Built Environment (PMBME) intends playing a major role in boosting the skills level and professional status of 41 industries that have pledged allegiance to the PMBME's goals, says Dr Ivor Blumenthal, CEO of ArkKonsult, the consultancy spearheading the PMBME's proposed operations in collaboration with Master Builders Association (MBA) North.

Dr Blumenthal, speaking at the annual general meeting of the SA Paint Manufacturing Association (SAPMA) in Pretoria, said top of the PMBME objectives is improving the access by employers and employer associations in the Master Built sector to millions or rands of Skills Levy funds and National Skills Funds being paid by industry to the government annually, and administered by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

He said that the Department of Higher Education and Training had re-routed funds intended for skills training to solve governmental crises such as the R2.3 billion "Fees-Must-Fall" protest campaign, and the debt of R4.5 billion owing by 71 000 students to universities in SA.

"Government says industry has sanctioned this diversion of its funds but among the PMBME fold not a single member has been approached in this regard by the Ministry of Higher Education and Training," he stated, referring to an interview he had conducted with a spokesperson for the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, where it was made clear that in the future the Skills Levy would be redirected in-part (60%) to the 50 public Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET) colleges and the balance to universities. "My concern is that in the spokesperson's statement there was no mention of private training providers having access to the Skills Levy, and importantly a blatant disregard for existing employees on whose behalf the Skills Levy was actually paid in the first place."

SAPMA as representative body for the coatings industry is one of the 41 industries (grouped into 10 chambers) supporting the PMBME initiative. SAPMA is part of the Paint and Applications Chamber of the PMBME.

Dr Blumenthal said the PMBME could be likened to a COSATU - "but in this case, a confederation of employer associations, acting in mutual interest". The aim was to grade PMBME member companies according to specified criteria, among which will be skills development and the recognition of prior learning. "The long-term goal is to not only ensure that members are eligible to tender for government and private sector contracts on a preferential basis but also to also provide peace of mind to the public in-terms of both the competency and behaviour of professionally-recognised staff and PMBME-graded companies.

"The PBMBE will issue 'skills passports' to professionally designated individuals working throughout the sector to assure the public that when they do business with a PBMBE-graded company, or when they employ individuals professionally recognised by the PBMBE, they are dealing with parties who will have to conform to the PBMBE's competence as well as moral and ethical standards."

He said for the last 12 years employers had been paying 1% of their payroll to government as a Skills Levy on the understanding that the companies would then be entitled to get a percentage of that money back if they invested in skills and training, such as sending employees on accredited training, or enrolling new employees on learnerships.

"The landscape has changed and that's why it is doubly important now to have an effective Employer Confederation capable of properly articulating the interests of all employers among the 41 industries which constitute the PBMBE. The Statutory Body and SETA landscape makes allowances for effective and productive employer representation and engagement. Employers are referred to as 'Social Partners, Decision Makers and Influencers' and therefore need to be professional in how they express their collective mandates in those forums. That is what the PBMBE intends to do, constituted by the sum of its parts, SAPMA being one of them.

"Employers cannot continue to point fingers at the elusive 'They' consisting of trade unions, government, and statutory bodies. Employers are part of those statutory bodies and have always been invited to sit alongside the other Social Partners. The PBMBE aims to be more effective articulating the interests of employers as a collective confederation rather than as employers associations on their own, acting in isolation. When employers stand up to take responsibility for self-governance and positively articulate their positions and needs, the other Social Partners will respect the input of well represented employers and accommodate their requirements. "

Dr Blumenthal urged SAPMA members to become involved in PBMBE activities and seek PBMBE benefits when these become available in the latter half of the year. "You have to become engaged in the PBMBE by supporting every SAPMA initiative. Mandate SAPMA to ensure the best deal for your industry. If you, as SAPMA members, want to ensure that you can trade freely in future and collectively form a strong alliance to veto matters that have a harmful effect on the coatings sector, such as the increasing dumping on imports - you need to become engaged and vested in SAPOMA and thereby in the PBMBE.

"SAPMA is a fine example of a true guild, and one of only a handful South African associations that have established an exemplary operational base to safeguard members' interests. It is essential that all SAPMA members become more familiar with, and involved in, its initiatives such as supporting the mission of PBMBE. It's now or never when it comes to industry showing a unified front for survival in the South African scenario," he added.

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Caption:

Dr Ivor Blumenthal, pictured addressing the SAPMA annual general meeting: "It's now or never to industry to unite to safeguard its training investments," he urged.

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Issued for SAPMA, Bedfordview/ Further info: Deryck Spence, tel 011 615 1195 / www.sapma.org.za