



Health and Safety plans must accommodate people with disabilities

What would happen in your organisation if a fire were to break out? Would all occupants of the building be able to reach safety quickly and without panic and without sustaining avoidable injuries?

Does that include all employees with disabilities? The person who may not hear the fire alarm? The person who cannot see the exit signs? What about the person who is unable to use the fire escape because he is in a wheelchair, or simply doesn't have the physical strength to walk down innumerable flights of stairs?

Alexander Forbes has a plan that takes account of all eventualities, the company's Group Chief HR Officer, Thabo Mashaba, told delegates at the recent SAE4D breakfast meeting.

"Every company needs to take steps to deal with all emergencies – from environmental emergencies to medical emergencies. We have developed a plan that ensures that the needs of all employees are catered for – including those with disabilities."

This includes the appointment and training of first aiders, as well as fire marshals, floor marshals and evacuation leaders as well. The relevant local emergency services have also been involved in drawing up the plan.

"The last thing one needs when an emergency occurs is for everyone to start running around. All our employees know the evacuation procedures. They know what to do within the building and what to do, as well as where to go when they get outside."

The importance of regular drills cannot be overemphasised.

This was clearly – and tragically – illustrated in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. Almost 3 000 employees of one firm, Morgan Stanley, were able to walk unscathed out of the building before it collapsed because of regular drills. Many others died because they did not know what to do: for example – many

tried to get on to the roof of the towers, not knowing that the doors to the roof were locked; and unaware that there was no way to rescue them from there. You can read an account of the Morgan Stanley rescue [here](#).