



Reminder! Role of shop stewards in enforcing workplace occupational health and safety

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act) 85 of 1993 was introduced for workplaces to protect the health and safety of workers and the public against health and safety risks. It is an instrumental part of improving workplace conditions. The PSA has, however, seen an increase in government buildings not meeting basic occupational health and safety standards.

As labour representatives, shop stewards play a critical role in ensuring that health and safety matters are reported and that steps are taken to provide a healthy, safe, and conducive work environment. Shop stewards are the bridge between employees and management, ensuring that workplace environments are compliant with legal requirements. This responsibility is vital for safeguarding lives and for enhancing productivity and morale.

Advocates for safe working conditions

One of the primary responsibilities of shop stewards is to advocate for the implementation of comprehensive OHS policies. They work to ensure that employers adhere to the OHS Act, by identifying potential hazards, report unsafe practices, and pushing for corrective measures to protect workers.

Educating and empowering workers

Shop stewards must educate employees about their rights and responsibilities regarding workplace safety. By organising training sessions and awareness campaigns, they empower workers to recognise and report hazards. This proactive approach fosters a culture of safety, where employees feel confident in their ability to contribute to a secure working environment.

Monitoring compliance

Regular workplace inspections are another critical aspect of shop stewards' role. They collaborate with safety officers and management to monitor compliance with OHS standards. This also means ensuring proper use of personal protective equipment and addressing structural risks. Shop stewards act as vigilant overseers, addressing issues before these escalate. Effective communication is essential for resolving safety concerns. Shop stewards serve as mediators, facilitating dialogue between employees and employers. They ensure that employee grievances related to health and safety are addressed promptly, preventing conflicts, and fostering cooperation.

In this pivotal role, shop stewards often face challenges, including limited resources, resistance from management, and the complexity of evolving safety regulations. However, their position also presents opportunities to influence workplace policies positively. OHS cannot be overstated and by advocating for safety, educating workers, and ensuring compliance, shop stewards protect lives and enhance workplace standards. Their efforts fulfill legal obligations and demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of all employees, fostering a culture where safety becomes a shared priority.

Shop stewards requiring assistance with OHS matters are advised to contact the relevant PSA Provincial Office.

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