

No SABS, claims the coatings industry

Roy Cakayne

SOUTH Africa's coatings industry claims the paint testing laboratories at the SA Bureau of Standards (SABS) appeared to be non operational, which was damaging the industry.

Deryck Spence, the executive director of the SA Paint Manufacturing Association (Sapma), said yesterday that the SABS paint section is believed to be operating through a single employee – a far cry from about 13 employees it used nearly two years ago.

"I know for a fact the SABS is not testing paint anymore. About 20 Sapma members submitted products to the SABS for testing and indicated the SABS had done nothing," Spence said.

"We have a major problem with them (SABS). I'm not for one minute saying the SABS is collapsing, but the paint section is."

He added that an SABS quality approval mark was essential for any government contract.

"The Department of Public Works simply will not award tenders for products that do not carry the SABS marks of approval.

"This precludes many of our members from bidding for lucrative government projects. Yet all Sapma approaches and appeals to the SABS have drawn no response and the SABS testing laboratories would appear to be non operational," he said.

Spence said the SABS was charging R100 000 for a company to get a quality mark for a single paint product, but coatings companies could not get the testing done.

He said the SABS standards division described itself as the only recognised national institution for the development, maintenance and promotion of South African National Standards (SANS), which formed the basis for all the other services offered by the SABS, such as testing and certification.

But Spence said Sapma was hugely concerned about the lack of co-operation it was receiving from the SABS.

"In fact, the coatings industry is beginning to question if the SABS is still an active guardian and promoter of quality standards in this country, or even operating at all in key areas.

"There have been increasing signs of total apathy and alarming disinterest in the past year, based on our dealings, or attempted dealing, with the bureau," he said.

Spence said the SABS was also the only government body that could provide the specifications for quality management systems and test methods for the coatings industry.

Ian Plaatjes, the SABS corporate services executive, said some of Sapma's allegations were unfounded but the SABS was still open to having a discussion with the association with a view to resolving issues.

Plaatjes said the SABS was committed to protecting and promoting the South African economy by ensuring that products and services were of a high quality and met established standards.

He said the paint industry was an important part of the economy and the SABS worked closely with the industry.

"It is unfortunate that the comments made by Sapma do not refer to any specific complaints, especially as Sapma has been part of our technical committees for more than 20 years and is still an active member," he said.

Plaatjes did not respond to specific questions posed by Business Report.