

SAPMA slams government apathy

Government's apparent lack of concern about the dwindling number of qualified coatings technologists in South Africa is a matter of grave concern, warns Deryck Spence, executive director of the SA Paint Manufacturers Association (SAPMA). Spence said the coatings industry is plagued by a serious shortage of skills in research and development, exacerbated by the fact that the relatively few paint chemists operating in South Africa are now near retirement age. "Despite this ominous scenario, which has been spelt out to government by SAPMA repeatedly for many years, the training authorities are currently more obsessed with the qualification as paint applicators by the thousands of jobless people," he stated.

Spence said SAPMA fully supported the concept of job-creation at low skills levels but in declining to provide grants for the training of technologists to advance the industry, the training authorities clearly overlook that without technology there would not be paint to generate an income for applicators.

"Coatings technologists are essential. They contribute to the assessment, development, reformulation, quality, maintenance, and enhancement of products through planning, executing, and analysis of experiments. Green building calls for sustainable and non-polluting manufacturing processes as well as products that do not release harmful compounds into the atmosphere or water. Without qualified and experienced technologists, the coatings industry would not have been able to comply with many of the stringent laws now in place the world over."

Spence said paint was often simply regarded as a decorative coating but - through technological research - coatings had contributed revolutionary scientific advancements of global benefit.

"Overseas, paint chemists developed the formulation of a top coat one hundred times thinner than the human hair. When applied to the body of a jet aircraft, for example, the reduction in drag saves millions of dollars in fuel and flight scheduling. "Technological research in the UK has developed paint that conducts electricity that is now spawning substantial interest from governments as well as the building industry.