



Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs

Address by

Hon. Desmond Van Rooyen

Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Head of

On the occasion of the Safer Stoves Campaign at Masiphumelele, Cape Town,
Western Cape Province, South Africa

8 December 2016

Programme Director,

Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies,

Executive Mayor of the City of Cape Town, Patricia de Lille

MMC responsible for Safety and Security, Alderman JP Smith

Councillors,

Senior government officials;

Distinguished delegates, guests and members of the community

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good morning,

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the organisers for inviting me to partake in this important gathering. It is indeed a pleasure and an honour for me

to address the community on a topical and critical matter such as fire risk reduction.

PROBLEM STATEMENT REGARDING FIRE RISKS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA

Program Director, our country faces increasing levels of disaster risk. It is exposed to a wide range of weather hazards, including drought (which is currently affecting most of our provinces), floods, veldfires and severe storms that can trigger widespread hardship and devastation. In addition to these, South Africa also faces several man-made hazards including a complex fire risk, characterised by informal settlement fires which continue to undermine livelihoods and resilience of poor people living in informal settlements. This fire problem is further complicated by the living conditions in informal settlements characterised by narrow streets which are inaccessible to fire services vehicles, lack of fire fighting water supply as well as the lack of street names which complicates endeavours to reach people in need timeously.

The fact that most informal settlement structures or shacks are built with highly combustible materials (frequently wood and plastic) and in close proximity of each other, heighten the risk of fires in these areas. The lack of electricity in most informal settlements, means that communities have to utilise other sources of energy such as paraffin stoves for cooking, heating and candles for lighting. With regard to paraffin related fires, the Household Energy Safety Association of South Africa (HESASA) points out that more than 200 000 people per year are injured or lose their property due to paraffin induced fires. **Experience and research have demonstrated that most informal settlement fires are caused by paraffin stoves that do not comply with South African Standards and Specifications as required.**

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN DEPARTMENT OF COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY, NATIONAL REGULATOR OF

COMPULSORY SPECIFICATIONS AND NATIONAL CONSUMER COMMISSION

The Department of Cooperative Governance's National Disaster Management Centre, has entered into partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, National Regulator of Compulsory Specifications as well as the National Consumer Commission to remove these unsafe and illegal stoves from our communities thereby contributing to reducing the risk of fires. Program Director, I am aware that today's event marks the one year anniversary since this partnership was officially launched in Tembisa where 3000 non-compliant stoves were removed and replaced with safer and compliant paraffin stoves. I also want to take this opportunity to commend the national coordinating team for taking the campaign to the Free State and North West provinces respectively. During these campaigns, more than 2000 non-compliant paraffin stoves were removed from the communities of Theunissen (Free State) and Klerksdorp (North West).

I am confident that this initiative/ partnership will contribute significantly in reducing fire risks within our communities. This partnership demonstrates our commitment to put people and their needs first within the context of the Back to Basics (BtB) programme adopted by government in September 2014.

TRAINING OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INSPECTIONS OF BUSINESSES IN AND AROUND MASIPHUMELELE

Program Director, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the National Regulator of Compulsory Specifications (NRCS) and the National Consumer Commission (NCC) for the training on how to identify unsafe and non-compliant paraffin stoves that they provided to identified volunteers from Masiphumelele. I am confident that this training will enable the volunteers to better educate our communities about the dangers of unsafe stoves. I also wish to commend the NRCS and the NCC for the excellent work done with regard to the inspection of the various business premises in order to identify business operators who are

selling non-compliant stoves in the area with a view to ensure that they are brought to book.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY-BASED FIRE RISK REDUCTION INITIATIVES

While the fire services are generally classified as a first responder along with other agencies such as Emergency Medical Services, strictly speaking, **communities are first responders to fire incidents especially those that occur in their residential areas. This means that communities must be at the heart of strategies to prevent, mitigate, prepare and respond to fires.** In this regard, Program Director, I wish to take this opportunity to commend the City of Cape Town for the various community-based fire risk reduction initiatives that they are providing under the comprehensive Burn Prevention Framework adopted by the Western Cape Provincial Government. I am confident that the City will sustain the safer stove campaign and will continue to educate communities within its jurisdiction about the dangers of unsafe and illegal stoves.

CREATING AN ENABLING LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Programme Director, My Department will ensure the development of applicable legislative and regulatory frameworks to support the delivery of fire services within the context of the Back to Basics Programme that was adopted in September 2014. While my Department is involved in various activities and programs to support fire services across the country, a process is also underway to revise the Fire Brigade Services Act, 1987 with a view to introduce a modern and comprehensive legislation which prioritise fire safety and prevention at community level. Cabinet approved the publication of the Draft White Paper on Fire Services for public comments during November 2016. I am encouraging you to scrutinise this draft policy framework and provide us with your written comments and inputs. The following are some of the key policy proposals necessary to reposition the fire services to deliver on its mandate and contribute positively to the National Development Agenda of the country:

- ❖ Clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all spheres of government;
- ❖ Locating fire services within the broader development trajectory of the country;
- ❖ Professionalisation of the fire services;
- ❖ Entrenching fire safety and prevention as core deliverables of the fire services.

Programme Director, in closing, I wish to reiterate that my Department will continue working with other sector departments and government entities to reduce fire risk and build community resilience to fires and other hazards. I also wish to thank the multi-sectoral team that was responsible for planning this event for a job well done.

I thank you!