

OHS compliance key to decent workplaces

Employment and Labour Deputy Minister, Boitumelo Moloi, says organisations must develop mandatory systems of health and safety compliance in order to create decent workplaces post Covid-19.



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Moloi was delivering the keynote address on Monday during the opening of the three-day Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) conference at Lagoon Beach Hotel in Cape Town.

The OHS Conference, which continues today, is held under the theme: “Decent work post the pandemic”.

Moloi told delegates that the Covid-19 pandemic has forced employers and workers to adapt quickly to new ways of working.

“Interestingly, many of these changes have brought unexpected benefits, such as improved productivity or working conditions. However, it is important that we not only focus on returning to work, but also take the lessons learned from the pandemic to re-strategize and prepare for future emergencies.

“We should not allow compliance to happen by accident. If you think compliance is exorbitant, try non-compliance,” Moloi said.

She said priority in the workplace should focus on the welfare of workers. Work delivery systems must also be designed to focus on outputs rather than activities.

“While the pandemic had presented us with difficult and challenging times, it has also brought some unexpected benefits, such as improvements in productivity or working conditions. In some ways, this has also improved the social aspects of workers and to enjoy a better work-life balance.

“In some cases, employers have also been able to reduce costs by adopting remote work arrangements or by introducing other new working practices,” Moloi said.



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The Deputy Minister said one of the challenges brought about by the pandemic and work-from-home at policy level was the development of mechanisms to deal with an inadequate policy environment. She said the department is ill-equipped to enforce OHS in private households.

In the same breath, Moloi said the pandemic has also had a negative impact on the world of work, and it has disproportionately affected certain groups of workers in non-standard forms of employment such as those in low-paid, precarious or informal jobs.

She said during Covid-19, the department had to intervene and developed a Covid-19 Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (Ters) to provide financial relief to workers who had been affected by the pandemic.

“Overall, the post-Covid-19 labour market in South Africa remains challenging, with businesses and workers still facing a certain level of uncertainty and disruption. In the post-pandemic period, health and safety inspectors will likely play an important role in enforcing health and safety regulations and guidelines to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in the workplace.

“In addition to monitoring and enforcing health and safety regulations, health and safety inspectors can also contribute to the development of new regulations and guidelines that reflect the changing nature of work post-pandemic,” Moloi said.

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