

Strong building regulations are critical in preventing infrastructure disasters

The recent tragic earthquakes in Syria and Turkey exposed the devastating realities of irregular and sub-standard building construction, highlighting why regulation, policies and legislation play such a critical role in construction.



Source: Supplied

“It is the basic premise of the building construction industry - any project, irrespective of size or scope, must strictly follow regulations that prescribe standards. We know that there are a number of reasons why buildings collapse, but if the foundations are strong and properly constructed, there is a greater chance of the building being able to withstand events, man-made or natural,” says Morag Evans, CEO of Databuild.

Evans adds that the devastating quake in Syria and Turkey made international news not just because of the loss of life and damage, but also because it shone a spotlight on the issue of safe and properly regulated building construction.

Local infrastructure concerns

While this disaster happened thousands of miles away, South Africa is not immune to disasters and there is concern about the condition of the country’s public logistics infrastructure.

“We picked up on an article written by William Gumede and published on the University of the Witwatersrand’s website which highlights the situation the country faces in terms of its infrastructure. Gumede writes that issues like lack of maintenance and relevant skills, and corruption have plunged the country into a situation in which any disaster could damage infrastructure and make it virtually impossible to repair.

“Why is this relevant? Reuters reported on a building that 'disintegrated' and, upon further investigation, had been recently remodelled without the required permits. In South Africa, we cannot assume that infrastructure can withstand any event and there is absolutely no way that all of our buildings have been constructed in full compliance with every municipal or provincial by-law and regulation. The point is that regulation is critical, it is the point of departure on any construction project and, unfortunately, South Africa has had its fair share of tragedy which underlines the necessity of compliance,” says Evans.



GIC CEO emphasises importance of addressing SA's small-scale infrastructure needs

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Hoérskool Driehoek tragedy

She refers to the tragic collapse of a bridge at the Hoérskool Driehoek that claimed the lives of four students in 2019.

“This tragic event powerfully illustrates that terrible things happen and construction projects have to be absolutely clinical in the execution of process and procedures. It was subsequently reported that the Gauteng Education Department appointed a team of structural engineers to perform an analysis of the school site. It’s not a case of ‘whose fault is it?’, it is actually a stark reminder that safety and standards are there for a reason. For all of us in the industry, it’s a major reality check and it is for this reason our message to the market is ‘compliance is non-negotiable’.”

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