“An accident does not wait for an appointment. It just happens.”
- Andries Moolman, Fire Safety Officer, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, Fire and Emergency Services Department.

Despite the best efforts of principals and teachers, accidents and violent incidents can and do occur in schools. This makes it paramount for South African schools to implement safety policies and emergency procedures as required by law and accepted as best practices.

In the workplace, the **Occupational Health & Safety Act** regulates safety procedures and practices. In schools, however, there is a tendency to focus solely on academic education and ignore the underlying issue of security. However, since the ability to teach and learn effectively is severely hindered by feelings of insecurity and the threat of danger, it is vitally important for schools to ensure the safety of their teachers and learners.

This urgent need was raised during discussions with the Department of Education District Officials about Peace Education. Officials noted that those involved in school safety committees needed to learn more about national safety regulations.

With this in mind, the GM South Africa Foundation introduced **School Safety** as one of its seven Peace Promoting Schools projects.

**Goals and objectives of the programme**

The overall aim of the **School Safety Programme** is to introduce safety programmes that comply with government safety regulations.

The Foundation provides guidelines and tools for organisations and government agencies that in turn help schools to meet specific school safety outcomes.

One of the components of the **School Safety programme** is **School Evacuation and Safety Planning**. This programme empowers schools to:

- Elect a Safety Committee to oversee safety and security matters at the school
- Formulate a School Safety Policy in consultation with all relevant stakeholders
- Produce a tried and tested School Evacuation Plan
- Successfully execute an evacuation drill monitored and approved by a fire official
- Have basic safety equipment in place
- Clearly display emergency and safety information in the school building according to set guidelines

**Programme background**

The School Safety Programme started in 2008 in partnership with the Department of Education’s Safe Schools Programme.

A survey was conducted on the safety issues within eleven schools in Port Elizabeth. The focus was on identifying security risks at these schools and recommending action for improving safety and security.

Based on these recommendations, a manual was developed that focussed on:

- Guiding schools to undertake a rapid risk management assessment.
- And providing a set of emergency procedure guidelines based on legislative requirements and international best practices.

The programme has since been extended to include working with school safety committees and school governing bodies to develop detailed school safety policies.

The process of formulating, circulating, implementing and monitoring school-specific safety policies has proven to be a complex but extremely necessary one.
Programme structure and content
The programme consists of the following (the number of workshops depends on the needs of the participating schools):

- A series of workshops on school safety policy development and implementation.
- Workshops to assist schools in implementing practical school safety and evacuation plans and procedures.
- Workshops to teach participants about the purpose of school safety committees and the roles of school safety officers.
- Mentoring sessions in which participants are encouraged to share challenges and experiences.
- On-site (at school) mentoring and support.

Partners and stakeholders
In this initiative the GM South Africa Foundation partnered with the Port Elizabeth District Office of the Department of Education, community-based organisations, participating schools, including school safety officers and representatives from school governing bodies.

Guidelines and support
The following resources are available to assist schools and organisations in implementing School Safety Procedures:

- User-friendly guides on:
  - Developing a school safety policy: a guide for schools
  - Emergency procedures toolbox for schools: regulations, guidelines and templates
  - The truth about domestic violence: a guide for teachers
  - Fire facts
- A ten-minute DVD on School Evacuation Procedures.
- Support for schools wishing to implement or upgrade their school safety procedures
- Support for organisations wishing to assist these schools. This support takes the form of training school safety officers and SGB representatives on safety procedures; and training the trainers for organisations wishing to implement such programmes in other areas.

Feedback from participants and facilitators:
“Workshops were very informative and gave us a good idea of where to start with the safety process”
“We now understand what a school safety policy is all about and that we should involve the community around the school in these issues”
“I am proud – I know how to develop a safety policy”
“We have extended the project further at our school by inviting parents to attend safety talks”
“Assignments were practical”.
“The project forced us to address safety issues at our school”

For further information, kindly contact the GM South Africa Foundation as follows:

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