



Sol Plaatje Emergency Service, the diamond of the Northern Cape

Sol Plaatje Emergency Services

The Sol Plaatje Local Municipality is situated in the Frances Baard District Municipality in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. It is bordered by Dikgatlong in the north, the Pixley ka Seme District in the south and west and the Free State Province in the east. It is one of the four municipalities that make up the district, accounting for a quarter of its geographical area. It includes the diamond mining city of Kimberley.

Sol Plaatje Municipality is named after Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, who was a South African intellectual, journalist, linguist, politician, translator and writer. Solomon Plaatje was born just outside Boshof in the Free State Province.

Kimberley is the capital city of the Northern Cape Province and is located approximately 110km east of the confluence of the Vaal and Orange Rivers. The city has considerable historical significance due to its diamond mining past and the siege during the Second Boer War and is known for its 19th-Century diamond mines such as the deep, hand-dug Big Hole. British businessmen, Cecil Rhodes and Barney Barnato, made their fortunes in Kimberley and the roots of the De Beers company can also be traced to the early days of the mining town. Nearby, the Kimberley Mine Museum is a recreation of the town in its

heyday and displays jewellery and uncut diamonds.

Kimberley was the first city in the Southern Hemisphere and the second in the world after Philadelphia to integrate electric street lights into its infrastructure on 2 September 1882. The first Stock Exchange in Africa was also built in Kimberley, as early as 1881.

South Africa's first school of aviation to train pilots for the proposed South African Aviation Corps (SAAC), was established in Kimberley in 1913. Known as Paterson's Aviation Syndicate School of Flying, it is commemorated in the Pioneers of Aviation Museum and a replica of the first Compton Patterson Biplane preserved there, situated near Kimberley Airport. In the 1930s Kimberley boasted the best night-landing facilities on the continent of Africa.

Fire service

Kimberley Fire Service (now Sol Plaatje Emergency Services) was established in 1887 and has been serving the community of Kimberley for 130 years. The first fire station was situated in Stockdale Street in Kimberley and Lieutenant Doyle was the person in charge of the fire service. The fire tender was a steam engine pulled by horses.

Sol Plaatje Emergency Services has an operational area of 3 800km², an annual budget of R32 000 000, 1 300

emergency calls per annum, services a population 280 000 and is headed up by Chief fire officer Martinus (Tinus) Wessel Pretorius. The service headquarters has been situated in its current location since 1957 ie for 60 years. A satellite fire station is situated in Ritchie and one in Galeshewe. A new satellite fire station will be built in Homevale extension and there is a seasonal station at the Langley resort.

Organisational structure

Sol Plaatje Emergency Services' organisational structure is constructed of its chief fire officer (CFO) Tinus ▶



Chief Tinus Pretorius



Sol Plaatje Emergency Services is situated in the diamond mining city of Kimberley

► Pretorius who is the senior manager, emergency services. Chief Pretorius is supported by three managers ie Riaan Janse van Vuuren for support services, Anthony Johannes Möller (acting) for operations and training and Ntanti John Sephiri for public safety and disaster management. Sol Plaatje also has three station commanders, Edward Mahri, Cameron Grant Andrews and Anthony Johannes Möller. The service employs 60 fire fighters on a two-shift system at its three stations.

Risk profile

Sol Plaatje's risk profile includes its central business district (CBD) area as a category A high risk area. Category E risks include hospitals, large shopping malls, airport, prisons, places of safety, old age homes, schools (secondary, primary, pre-primary) and petro-chemical depots. "We ensure annual public safety inspections on high risk areas as well as operational shift visits to familiarise ourselves about risks and to study contingency plans with identified high risk areas. We also have

annual situational drills to test/evaluate high-risk area contingency plans."

Operations

SolPlaatjeEmergencyServicescurrently responds from three fire stations, one of which is its headquarters. A new station in Homevale is on the cards for the next financial year. The service deploys a 24 hour, two shift system that runs from 8h00 to 17h00 and then on standby for 14 hours on the premises. The most common incidents the service responds to are structural and wildfires



Riaan Janse van Vuuren, with a future fire fighter



The recently refurbished call centre



Martha Nkewu, control centre operator; Ruth Vantu, clerk; Nabeelah Gool, clerk and Renei Basson, control centre operator



New lockers offer added security for staff



Sol Plaatje Emergency Services

as well as vehicle extrication, high-angle and confined space rescues and hazardous chemical spills.

All operational personnel are trained in all types of incident response including structural, veld and forest and petrochemical fires, handling of hazardous materials (hazmat), vehicle extrication, emergency medicine up to intermediate life support (ILS), high-angle rescues (HAT) and swift water rescue. "As far as urban search and rescue (USAR) is concerned, we do not have specialised USAR capacity, only basic capacity," added Chief Pretorius.

Equipment

We asked Chief Pretorius what operational equipment shortfalls there are and he replied, "Will you ever have enough equipment? As technology advances there is always a need for better and more appropriate equipment. Fire services are in the habit of always improvising if something falls short. Sometimes to our own detriment."

He added, "We have vehicles and equipment on our IDP to cater for our current replacement programmes and for future needs. We have budgeted for a new multi-purpose vehicle as well."

"A new fire station is also on the cards and is included in our 2017/18 budget, which is already approved," said Chief Pretorius.

Response vehicles include:

Vehicle	Year	Km
Scania major pumper	2009	108 097
Freightliner FL80	2001	168 201
Rosenbauer	1995	196 108
Ford Snorkel hydraulic platform	1980	46 051
Nissan UD290 water tanker	2008	71 485
Mercedes Benz water tanker	2012	47 283
Two hazmat trailers		
An emergency lighting and breathing apparatus trailer		
Four wildfire units		
Six light delivery vehicles (LDVs) as service vehicles		

"Our 1980 model Snorkel hydraulic platform's engine is going to be overhauled as well as its hydraulic system," said Chief Pretorius. All the above vehicles and equipment are on schedule for continuous preventative maintenance to ensure operational readiness at all times. The fire department also employs two full time mechanics and assistants who

are constantly busy with preventative maintenance programmes on the fleet as well as the equipment.

He added, "We have an up-to-date data base of all our fire hydrants' locations and water pressures. Some of our hydrants are still underground. The hydrants in our new areas are above ground. We also have a full time hydrant inspector to ensure a seamless response."

On his wish list, Chief Pretorius cites an incident command and control vehicle, fully equipped to manage any type of incident from. "Actually, my wish list is too long to mention!" he added.

Staff

We recruit members of the public as volunteers in the fire service. They are provided with training on the same level as full time fire fighters. As soon as permanent positions are open they may apply for the position. Other more senior positions first need to be advertised internally if we cannot find a suitable internal candidate the position is advertised externally. To apply for any vacant position the minimum requirements for the specific position need to be met.



The 1980 model Ford Snorkel hydraulic platform



The Scania major pumper



Blanket hand over as part of disaster relief



Jarrad Anderson and AJ van der Merwe

► Currently, all personnel are permanent workers, totalling 87, 10 of which are female, two operational and eight in the control centre. “We will be appointing 20 reservists in the next year to ensure new well-trained personnel for the planned new fire station. Our new organogram has been approved and will bring the

total number of personnel to 132,” added Chief Pretorius. “All personnel are trained in the areas of use and are competent. We are currently focusing on more specialised training courses to cater for the needs identified.”

Chief Pretorius responded to our question whether he feels that the

service has enough competent staff for the incidents at hand, “Yes but continuous retraining takes place to ensure operational readiness.”

Training

Sol Plaatje Emergency Service’s training section, in collaboration with operations, identifies the training needs and then presents a programme for the quarter to management for approval. Training is then presented every day for at least two hours per day on shift. “Most of our training is done internally. Only for specialised courses such as hazmat technician and EMS training, personnel are outsourced,” said Chief Pretorius.

Challenges

Challenges faced by the service include an aging fleet and budget constraints. Chief Pretorius is very optimistic about their challenges and added, “We keep up with the challenges through continuous training and retraining. We also implemented a preventative maintenance programme on all vehicles and equipment.”



A school visit during National Fire Safety Week

Incidents

The largest incident attended to by the service was a train accident and a bus accident with multiple casualties. "We also responded to a derailing of a train containing hazardous chemicals.

Fire safety

"We run a number of fire safety awareness programmes for schools and community members per ward." The programme consists of the following:

- Fire safety in and around the house
- Safe storing and clear labelling of all dangerous goods (flammable liquids and gasses)
- Safety distances between shacks before erected

- Basic fire fighting techniques in the informal settlement environment

Fire safety challenges faced by Sol Plaatje EMS include the cooperation of political councillors in the identification process of candidates and attendance by community members to courses presented.

Statistics

1. Population 280 000
2. Size of area covered 3 800km²
3. Emergency calls 1 300 per annum

Interagency involvement

Sol Plaatje Emergency Service is also responsible for disaster

management and has a working relationship with the district disaster management centre. "We also assisted with the establishment of a fire protection association."

Although not a large fire service, the emphasis falls heavily on fire safety, prevention and awareness. "My management style is to make people believe in themselves and their capabilities by taking full responsibility for their actions. I have an open door policy to address challenges as soon as possible. We need to grow responsible leaders for tomorrow," concluded Chief Pretorius. 