

# City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy now IFSAC accredited

*SC Frederik Munnik, station commander: Fire Training Academy, City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service*



**Clinton Manuel taking receipt of the IFSAC Certificate of Accreditation form Mr Derek Simmons**

The City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy received its International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) accreditation in September 2021. The academy is the first local government fire service training academy to receive the IFSAC recognised accreditation within South Africa.

A local government fire and rescue service has a legislative responsibility compelling it to develop the skills of their workforce and capacitate their human resource with prescribed qualifications. It is stipulated that the workplace must be used as an active learning environment and that a municipality must budget for the development and implementation of training programmes.

The City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy is declared a training institution under the Fire Brigade Services Act (99 of 1987). It has been providing training since 1991 and over time met all prescripts of being recognised as a training provider in South Africa.

The Academy is learner-directed and focused on competence-based training objectives. Each employee or partnership institution member is developed so that s/he will be empowered to master certain skills objectives at specified levels of competence.

Though having been compliant to the IFSAC policy, we did not have direct access to their certification. The City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy is seen as a legitimate entity with registered instructors, assessors and moderators. It was the first accredited municipal fire service training provider, registered with the Local Government Sector Education and Training (LG SETA), under the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), during 2005.

As part of a metropolitan municipal fire service, the Academy sought and achieved accreditation with the South African Emergency Services Institute (SAESI) for six IFSAC levels during 2008; this being the only access route to obtaining

occupational focused international qualifications at the time.

Some years later, we were also accredited with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) as a skills development provider and assessment centre.

However, neither SAQA nor the QCTO certifies against the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, which is seen as international best practise and is the set benchmark for professional fire fighters in South Africa. Some of these codes and standards were adopted within South Africa as far back as 1993.

The Fire Training Academy consists of four organisational structures being the facilitation, assessment, moderation and facilities management sections. Currently staffed with 22 uniformed members, contributing to a collective 656 years of experience, they not only facilitate ongoing training, conduct assessments or independent moderation but also remain operationally active and tend to emergency incidents as the need arises. In turn, the uniformed staff is supported by two administrative officers, five maintenance staff and seven contractual Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) staff members.

In the past, the Academy was able to cater for the accredited training needs of the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Services staff, though be it through having to register NFPA-aligned courses with a third entity. However, we could only provide intermittent training to some staff members of the other five district and 24 local municipal fire services within the Western Cape Province. Very few of these fire services had direct

access to accredited training, let alone certification against international standards such as those of the NFPA. Thus, to obtain certification of any such achieved qualifications, fire service staff was forced to also interact with a third party on completion of their registered training course. This at cost to the individual employee as the Municipal Financial Management Act prohibits local governments from making payment to a third party via a non-competitive process; and from the enrichment of another entity, deriving from the functions and services as provided by a municipality, creating a dilemma with undesirable ripple effects throughout the fire services within the Western Cape Province.

Clinton Manuel, Head: Training for the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy, is currently the chairperson for the Western Cape Provincial Training Committee and continually involved with the SAQA Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), QCTO and the like. Over the past years he has identified shortfalls and barriers in obtaining professional qualifications within the fire service, thus he opted to find a resolve in accessing IFSAC certification. He approached the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service chief fire officer, CFO Ian Schnetler and financial head, Timothy Ackerman (retired), indicating the wish to explore the possibility of establishing a direct affiliation with IFSAC.

In turn, they supported the concept and the string of benefits that such an alliance could pose for the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service staff members. Mr Manuel was given 'carte blanche' to explore our accreditation potential, identify and network possible avenues and in preparing to make application to IFSAC. Chief Schnetler motivated the importance and benefits of this project to the city's hierarchy, whilst Mr Ackerman was instrumental in obtaining funding and generously providing expertise guidance on the crucial financial aspects and processes.

Identified benefits of this venture would include establishing a direct



**IFSAC site visit team members: Derek Simmons, Bill Benjamin, Clinton Manuel Matthew Thorpe, Angela White**

link on a global platform with higher educational institutes such as the Oklahoma State University situated in Stillwater, USA and enabling consultation and allowing for guidance on NFPA standards and international best practices. This will ensure that an international-aligned standard of training is maintained, which also incorporates occupational orientated psychomotor components. Fire service instructors, trained and certified on par with international standards, can be more effectively deployed within the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service and the Western Cape, bringing quality training to greater numbers of local and provincial emergency service members.

Being able to issue IFSAC-seal bearing certificates, affords members of fire services the opportunity to become qualified and potentially speeds their advancement opportunities, as certification delays will be eliminated, being advantageous to career pathing and promotional processes. It also circumvents interaction with a third entity with over prescriptive policies and restrictions that resulted in lengthy backlogs of staff waiting to attend a particular training course or receive certification after successful completion of a registered training intervention.

As per the generic job description, fire service officers are responsible

for and have accountability in training their staff. Officers can be empowered to invest in the skills development and growth of their staff. Skills can be aligned to generic key performance areas detailed within an individual's job descriptions, strengthening the ties between skills ability and job functions.

After tedious months of exploration and preparation, Mr Manuel submitted an application to IFSAC during October 2019, requesting that the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Training Academy becomes a non-voting IFSAC member. He travelled to Lexington in the USA to present our case and provide motivational context of the legislative requirements of fire services within South Africa. Following a procedural voting process and based on the strong case presented to the Accreditation Board by Mr Manuel, our application was accepted with an amendment; the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Training Academy would be a voting member of IFSAC.

A site visit by IFSAC members to the Fire Training Academy was scheduled to take place over a period of eight days during May 2020, to evaluate aspects of the 86 certifying levels that were applied for. However, the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 forced postponement to July 2020. With the odds stacked against us due to the global pandemic restricting international travel, the

## Training

- ▶ site visit was called off indefinitely as South Africa entered the second wave of COVID-19 infections.

However, we endured and Mr Manuel forwarded yet another site visit motivation during March 2021, proposing that a web-based site visit be conducted. In support, he highlighted the negative impacts that a delay in accreditation would have on all the fire services of the Western Cape. Reiterating the cumbersomeness of working through a third entity, expanding on the negative effects of delayed certification being not only financially costly to individuals but also resulting in delayed advancement having an indirect cost to the person due to lost income. The Certificate Assembly Board of Governors (CABoG) agreed to the notion of conducting a virtual site visit, conditional that it be scheduled on the American time zones and limiting the amount of certification levels applied for initially to 30. As such the virtual site visit transpired from 2 August 2021 with an exit interview conducted five days later on 6 August 2021. The IFSAC City of Cape Town site visit endeavour would push the boundaries of IFSAC as the world's first site visit being conducted virtually since the organisation's inception in 1990 and later prove to be the 'new norm'.

An IFSAC site visit team consisting of four members was assigned to conduct the evaluation of our Academy. Lead by Matthew Thorpe of the Office of State Fire Marshal, North Carolina and assisted by three esteemed site team members hailing from Wisconsin Technical College, Portland Community College and the director of Fire Services for the Department of Justice and Public Safety in Newfoundland, Canada. Their task was to review the certification levels applied for against established NFPA standards and IFSAC's criteria for certificate accreditation. Inclusive of aspects related to certificate administration, our academy policy and procedures, written and manipulative skills tests, test development and assessment methodology along with the management and security thereof. The evaluation also included conducting internal interviews with

the Cape Town presenting team members in relation to current norms and operations at our training academy and within our fire service.

Under the leadership of Mr Manuel, a team of seven staff members was assembled to present the various required components of the eventual allotted 32 bread and butter certification levels during the site visit. The team presenting on behalf of City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service consisted of our training head, Mr Manuel, presenting policies and procedures components, along with divisional commanders J Laubscher (facilitation), D Wheatley (assessment), M Abrahams (moderation) and E van Bergen (course and assessment registrations and quality assurance), whilst station commanders M Makeleni, L Grobbelaar and F Munnik represented as instructors/assessors.

On the day, each site visit evaluation was preceded with a presentation team briefing starting at 09h00. Thereafter, we made final preparations prior to engaging with the IFSAC site team members from 14h00 onward. Forming breakaway groups within the virtual platform, the team members would present the various aspects assigned to them and partake in interviews until the evaluation day's conclusion around midnight, South African time. The presenting team members underwent direct questioning and had to field interrogation of submitted document components from very experienced and knowledgeable evaluators.

IFSAC policy allows a 90-day period for any amendments and resubmission of documents after conclusion of a site visit. The presenting team, through pure resilience and determination, committed to doing this overnight. Thus, by conclusion of the site visit team's evaluation, all documents that required some amendment were re-submitted and approved; a feat unsurpassed and as such was commented on by the site visit team leader during the exit interview and within his report to the Certificate Assembly Board of Governors. Mr Thorpe stated that the

professionalism, experience, expertise and passion of the presenting team members were exemplary. He made mention that the team's efforts in preparation was evident, also noted their openness to comments and/or recommendations of the site visit evaluators and commended their immediate correction/modification of presented components. Bearing in mind this was the first time that the presenting team members participated in a process of this nature, their commitment to excellence and dedication to the personnel within the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service came to the fore. The team maintained that their selfless efforts were to the common good of our fire service and its members.

It should be noted that whilst the presentation team was immersed in the site visit, the remaining staff assigned to the Fire Training Academy continued unabated with the scheduled training activities of recruit fire fighters and operational staff, in spite of reduced training staff numbers.

On 1 September 2021 at the IFSAC CABoG meeting, the site visit team's report was tabled, reviewed and voted on by the Certificate Assembly. The outcome was unconditional accreditation being granted for the 32 certification levels applied for by the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy.

The IFSAC Fall Meeting, involving the General Assembly and CABoG, took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the USA from 21 to 23 October 2021. The invite was extended to Mr Manuel, who in response stated, "It was well received and a joyful moment that brought a sense of higher achievement on a global scale, when the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service name was seen listed on the IFSAC meeting agenda."

He attended the Fall Meeting and reflected on the amalgamation of the laborious efforts during the past two years, all converging during the moment when presented with the IFSAC Certificate of Accreditation for the City of Cape Town Fire

and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy. This accolade was received alongside other international entities such as UAE Abu Dhabi, US Department of Defence Fire and Rescue Services and various US State Training Institutes.

Whilst in Tulsa, Mr Manuel attended training on assessment and certification processes against NFPA standards and related assessment methodologies. He was also invited to attend site team leader training, during which the City of Cape Town virtual site visit process was dissected, with the eventual conclusion that it will serve as the benchmark for future site team visits of this nature. It became apparent that IFSAC underestimated the knowledge, skill and abilities of the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy staff to function on a global platform. In future, all site visit team leaders will use our model when rolling out virtual site visits due to inherent advantages to the safety of participating IFSAC site visit team members and the financially beneficial factors.

After the Certificate Assembly meeting, Mr Manuel was appointed as a governor, being the first South African citizen to serve on the IFSAC Certificate Assembly Board of Governors (CABoG), making him eligible for election as a member of IFSAC Certification Board, who manages and decides on the business dealings of IFSAC on the global platform, thereby also concreting relations with the Oklahoma State University.

Due to our direct accreditation with IFSAC, the South African Emergency Services Institute was forced to repeal the City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service long standing accreditation with them. Thus, the Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service can no longer traverse the SAESI route to obtain registration of IFSAC accredited training programmes. Fortunately, this was anticipated and our policies and procedures document, as approved by IFSAC, could accommodate registration of the then ongoing courses.



*Recipients of the first City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service Fire Training Academy IFSAC Hazmat Awareness Level certificates issued*

In turn, this allowed the Fire Training Academy to host their first graduation ceremony on 3 December 2021, which was attended by the Safety and Security Directorate MAYCO member, Alderman JP Smith as the keynote speaker, chief fire officers and management staff of the Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service and several neighbouring fire services, members of the City of Cape Town chaplaincy, along with family and friends of the certificate recipients. The honour of presenting the very first, IFSAC seal bearing City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service certificates was bestowed on the initiator of this dream, Mr Manuel. A total of 15 certificates for Fire Service Instructor 1 (NFPA 1041) and 22 certificates for Hazardous Materials/Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Awareness Level (NFPA 1072) was presented to qualifying staff members. In continuation of setting a global trend, the ceremony was virtually live streamed.

The selfless efforts of the Fire Training Academy staff, who will not personally benefit from this endeavour, contribute to the future development of fire service members within the City of Cape Town, other provincial emergency services, response agencies, higher learning institutions and other partners/stakeholders. We are now better equipped to capacitate our staff and through making training more accessible, we can empower other institutions to capacitate

themselves, this being the first of many benefits. To this end, the City of Cape Town Fire Training Academy has already fielded enquiries from other local emergency services and international entities for assistance.

Now, the City of Cape Town Fire Training Academy is an internationally recognised and fully accredited training institute, no longer obliged to subscribe to standards of a lesser level. We are a direct certifying agency, having its own policies and procedures and no longer a subsidiary to or having to deal with a third party to promote occupational and personal development of our staff. This not only allows us to prescribe how we do business; being a voting member, we may also provide input into the business of IFSAC, potentially reaching the global community.

Whilst attending proceedings during the fall meeting in Tulsa in the US, Mr Manuel was not only presented with the City of Cape Town Fire Training Academy accreditation certificate but also accepted our first IFSAC certificate seals. In doing so, he removed a large financial burden from the fire fighting community within the Western Cape. Previously a certificate bearing an IFSAC seal had to be procured at cost of R520 (current to date) per certificate application; this deficit being the liability of the particular individual making the application. Based on this cost, the monetary value of the

# The importance of an effective incident management team during emergency situations

By Michelle Kleinhans, managing director, Dynamic Incident Management (Pty) Ltd



*Heard the phrase “Do you have an effective team?”*

*Does your jurisdiction have an effective and efficient incident management team (IMT)?*

*Are they trained and qualified Incident Command System (ICS) team members?*

*Does your jurisdiction follow the Incident Command System standardisation or follow their own?*

**E**ffective incident management teams are the foundation of every successful management of any emergency or disaster situation and are teams in which each member brings his or her knowledge and skills to the table, which contribute to the overall success of the management of the incident and the resources as ONE TEAM with ONE PLAN. ▶

- ▶ seals received by the City of Cape Town surmounts to an instantaneous saving of R1 560 000 to the current and future certificate applicants.

Our accreditation pose additional benefits in that staff members need not be taken from shift to attend training solely at the Fire Training Academy premises, devolving them from their operational functions. Targeted initial, continuation and/or conversion training, as depicted within the SANS 10090, can be rolled out whilst remaining at their designated workplace. Hence, not necessitating additional staff to work overtime or staff having to be transferred to fill gaps created whilst others are partaking in training programmes at the Fire Training Academy. Other beneficial cost saving is achieved through eliminating extra travelling expenditures and reducing overall training costs.

This also equates to more staff benefiting from standardised training whilst station crews can acquire the same skill sets as a unit, without negatively affecting their service delivery capabilities. This frees the Fire Training Academy to more easily accommodate induction training, expand on technical specialist training and focus on assessments of the various off-site training initiatives.

As an accredited assessment centre, the Fire Training Academy can provide other institutions access to assessment and certification within the levels of qualifications, thereby generating potential income that can financially benefit the City of Cape Town.

Though this initial and monumental milestone was achieved and

surpassed, there is no respite for the City of Cape Town Fire Training Academy staff. The initial goal of achieving 86 certifying levels was knee-haltered by the global pandemic. This team have proven that there are innovative methods to achieve the desired outcomes. Not resting on their laurels, they intend obtaining the other 54 levels through extension of scope early during 2022, thereby expanding on the legacy they have imprinted within the history of the City of Cape Town's Fire and Rescue Service.

In the words on Mr Manuel, “We can now grow our own trees to our own requirements and the greater community stand to reap the reward”.

Article reviewed by Clinton Manuel, head: training, City of Cape Town Fire and Rescue Service ▲