

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: IAAI SOUTH AFRICA: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 28 MARCH 2008

Members of the International Association of Arson Investigators South Africa,

It gives me great pleasure to submit to you the annual president's report. I have decided to highlight two topics in my report that represent the mainline Chapter activities during the past year. These are membership services and the Chapter involvement in the process of Professional Registration of Forensic Scientists. The last mentioned also raises a point of great concern to me, namely the non participation of members that are actively involved in the field of fire investigation consultancy, in the Certified Fire Investigator program.

But first let's explore the membership services over the past year. I think I can safely state that the numerous training opportunities that were offered by the Chapter during the past year have contributed to the knowledge base of members involved in fire investigation. Various topics including, fires caused by lightning, vehicle fire investigation, wildland fire investigation, investigative case studies and aspects relating to the National Building Regulations have been presented by well-respected speakers. Training topics that will be presented at today's AGM will continue in that vein and address more issues relating to building design and fire, as well as provide some insight into basic fire pattern identification. For the first time we will also offer the membership a live burn and my sincere gratitude is extended to Mr Kobus Stydom of Firelab for making this possible.

The Chapter website was also re-designed this year and the internet address changed to www.iaai-sa.co.za. The change allows access to control website content for our webmaster. We have also offered members the opportunity to forward their company logo and website address for posting on the Chapter website as a free service.

My gratitude is extended to Mr Kim Yates for his efforts in re-designing the Chapter website and serving as the webmaster.

The chapter will hopefully continue to provide these training and networking opportunities in the future. My best wishes are extended to the new board in their endeavors to bring you quality training experiences and Chapter interaction in the New Year of governance.

As far as the professional registration of fire investigators is concerned, I can report that during the November 2007 board meeting, the board mandated Jacob Lekotjolo and I to engage Comm. Edward Ngkoka, the National Commander of the Police Forensic Science Laboratory on this issue. Comm. Ngkoka is a member of the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions. During a meeting that took place in January 2008 a memorandum was handed to the Commissioner in which the current and historic background of the fire investigation landscape was explained. The Chapter also offered assistance in any process that might add value in the registration of fire investigators. To date little feedback has been received, but I have learned that the memorandum was discussed during the last Council Meeting in February. We have also subsequently learned that a moratorium has been placed on all further registrations in the field of forensic science pending consideration by the various council committees.

The current board of directors and I believe that the route we took with this issue was the correct one.

The question therefore arises; what do the chapter members do in the meantime while the moratorium is in place?

I believe that the Certified Fire Investigator program offers an excellent benchmark to all fire investigators. The certification is the benchmark certification in the USA and enjoys this stature as it considers education, experience, continuous training, and courtroom testimony for certification.

Sadly, even though available since 2001, only 4 Chapter members currently hold this certification and only one additional application has been received.

I can only therefore deduct that either members are not interested in obtaining this certification or that the requirements set by the IAAI are too high for South African fire investigators.

It is also my intention, with the consent of the new board of directors, to actively market the South African Chapter in the forthcoming year to the fire investigation client base in South Africa, as a leading fire origin and cause professional organization and the hidden benefits such clients will receive should they contract the services of a Chapter member and in particular, those of a certified fire investigator.

I therefore, once again urge all practicing fire investigation consultants to obtain the Certified Fire Investigator status as soon as possible. Once this is achieved the Chapter will obviously speak with a stronger voice should any discussion arise in the future regarding fire investigation standards and professional registration.

May I in closing thank the current board of directors and especially Mrs Bessie Noakes for their work and effort during the past year.

I wish the new board well for the forthcoming year.

Andre De Beer IAAI-CFI
President: IAAI-SA
28 March 2008

