

Proactive engagement around lockdown regulations needed, says MBA North

Certainty will help the construction industry plan more effectively, and could help save jobs, says Mohau Mphomela, executive director of Master Builders Association (MBA) North. The organisation is calling on government to engage proactively with the sector on lockdown regulations as they pertain to the construction industry.



L-R Mohau Mphomela, executive director, and Wayne Albertyn, president of Master Builders Association (MBA) North

“We realise that government is responding to a totally unexpected set of events and that it is to a certain extent feeling its way along, and we appreciate greatly the work they are doing. That said, we would like to request that the process of fleshing out the regulations should begin sooner rather than later,” says Mphomela.

“The construction sector is complex, and so drafting the regulations is no simple task. At the same time, it must be recognised that construction entered the lockdown period in a much weakened state, so anything that can be done to promote its sustainability would be hugely valued.”



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Regulation grey areas

Mphomela explains that while the Level 4 regulations state that only public works are permitted, there are still grey areas. For example, would a private contractor undertaking the construction of RDP houses for the government be allowed to operate under Level 4? The position is less clear when it comes to Level 3, which at present is, broadly speaking, expected to allow “commercial” projects to continue, and Level 2, during which “residential” projects may commence. The latter, it might be assumed, would refer to the typical “bakkie builders”, which are usually informal in nature and make extensive use of non-permanent labour.

Would a large contractor building multiple units in a residential development be able to work under Level 3, even though the project is, strictly speaking, “residential”? Another grey area would be the use of small sub-contractors on big commercial projects under Level 3 conditions – many of these would ordinarily fall under the “residential” classification and would typically not have the formal structures in place that Level 3 might envisage.



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Promoting strong buy-in

Wayne Albertyn, director of Gothic Construction and president of MBA North, adds that it is important for government to consult with the industry before drafting the regulations. “It’s also important that the regulations are informed by an in-depth understanding of the commercial and HR realities of the industry. By working closely with us, government will be in a much better position to draft regulations that we can comply with, and that accommodate our needs as well – that will promote strong buy-in, which is critical,” he says.

“Construction is not only a big provider of jobs, it’s also a foundational industry,” concludes Mphomela. “A highly developed and competent construction industry is a national asset and would play a key role in enabling us to re-embark on a growth path without having to rely on foreign companies, as so many African countries have to do. We must do everything in our power to protect this key asset – letting it go the way of our garment and textile industry would be a disaster that would materially affect our ability to rebuild the economy.”

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