

# Fly-by-night fabricators undermine stainless steel promise

Consumers tend to veer towards the cheapest option during tough economic times and some contractors may be tempted to cut corners, says John Tarboton, South African Stainless Steel Development Association (sassda) executive director. Unfortunately, contractor mistakes cost a fortune, mistakes kill profits and both parties usually blame the other, and often stainless steel itself, through angry exchanges that waste time - so what happens when stainless steel contractors fail to deliver on promises?



John Tarboton, South African Stainless Steel Development Association (sassda) executive director

“Based on the number of complaints we receive, we have seen a rising trend towards C steel fabricators moving into the stainless steel area without a full understanding of the differences between the materials, often with costly mistakes. Sassda’s role is to uphold an industry standard, provide advocacy and education for its members and the consumer and be a voice for best practice. Our code of conduct provides access to key pointers for contractors and consumers to consider before utilising a so-called ‘expert’ contractor,” says Tarboton.

## Poor installation

During contractor altercations, end-users are often misled to place the blame on stainless steel as a product, however sassda counters that in most cases it may not be poor fabrication, but rather the poor installation of the product. Apart from this being a safety risk, it can lower the life expectancy of the stainless steel product as its corrosion resistance becomes compromised. Sassda is clear that member companies which fail to adhere to their code of conduct regarding best practises will see their membership terminated.

“To become a member of sassda, a company needs to be ratified, meaning we investigate the company, making sure correct practises are being performed together with good business ethics. We provide education and training to both our members and the public on the qualities of stainless steel, the correct selection and the required grading of the material to the application, together with its required finishes. Stainless steel is a quality product. We understand that mistakes can happen, but it’s the way the member company handles it that sets a quality fabricator apart from the rest. We also appeal to consumers to only make use of our industry standard member knowledge and practices to avoid costly mistakes.”

## Sub-standard workmanship

Sassda was recently asked to intervene when approached by a disgruntled KwaZulu-Natal client unhappy with the construction, installation and workmanship of a balustrade on his upmarket home. Sassda KwaZulu-Natal regional manager Angie Baker visited the client on site and together with a technical expert generated a report for further Sassda review.

“It was completely unacceptable that carbon steel bolts had been used which accelerate galvanic corrosion and would cause the balustrade to fail in a relatively short period, leading to a possible safety hazard. The balustrade materials had also been contaminated by carbon steel carry-over in places, either during fabrication or installation, resulting in premature staining of the base material. Joints in the balustrade had been glued with an epoxy or adhesive instead of being welded and had come loose, with further poor joint quality seen in its construction, and the stainless steel had not been correctly polished after installation.”



Example of sub-standard stainless steel balustrade installation in KwaZulu-Natal.

## Safety hazard

“The job clearly did not comply with the legal requirements of SANS 10400 or SANS 10160, both of which require approval of the design and installation by a suitably qualified professional engineer, which we doubt was done. Quite bluntly, the balustrade was a hazard and dangerous to the safety of the home owner. We advised that the entire structure should be removed at the fabricator’s cost, and replaced using an experienced balustrade manufacturer,” says Baker.

“The current economy sees many people being left without a job while others might feel they are not earning enough so they start their own businesses with little or no knowledge of stainless steel. This causes a problem for stainless steel in the industry as incorrect procedures are used providing the end user a sub-standard job and making stainless steel look bad. Stainless steel is a great product and if fabricated and installed correctly it can last the consumer a life time; if not it can corrode in a matter of months.”

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>