ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY (OHS) AND SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

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Introduction

- **Objective:** To explore the role of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in creating sustainable, healthy, and safe educational environments.
- The importance of OHS in planning, design, and managing educational facilities with a focus on South African legislation, particularly the OHS Act and related standards.

What is OHS in Education?

- OHS refers to policies and procedures aimed at ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of everyone involved in educational facilities
- OHS Act (South Africa): The Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 provides a framework for protecting employees (e.g. lectures, teachers, maintenance staff, cleaners and other employees within the universities or similar institutions) and students in South African institutions

Key Considerations:

  - Health & Safety policies for schools and universities
  - Emergency preparedness and response
  - Risk management for various activities and construction phases

What is Sustainability in Education Facilities ?

- Sustainability is the ability to maintain safe, healthy environments while conserving resources for future generations.
- The Role of OHS in Sustainability:
    - Reducing risks to long-term health
    - Promoting safe learning environments
    - Ensuring energy-efficient, eco-friendly practices
    - Aligning with South Africa's environmental standards

Relationship Between OHS, Sustainability, and Facility Design

- Sustainable design prioritizes materials, energy efficiency, and a safe physical environment.
- Ergonomics ensures the comfort and productivity of students and staff. OHS Influences the design and construction of these facilities by:
    - Ensures facilities comply with safety standards
    - Integrates hazard control from the design phase
    - Promotes ergonomic and safe workspaces for educators, staff, and students

Sustainability in Educational Facility Design

- Green Building Practices, Use of non-toxic, sustainable materials (Green Star rating systems) Energy-efficient systems (lighting, heating, ventilation)
- Rainwater harvesting and waste management
- Healthy environments reduce illnesses and improve air quality.

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Health and Safety Concerns in Education Facilities

Common Hazards:

- Fire safety issues, such as evacuation plans
- Unsafe chemical storage in labs
- Electrical hazards in workshops
- Inadequate access control and security
- Lack of disability access (ramps/elevators)
- Poor ventilation, leading to air quality problems
- Slips and trips due to poor flooring or lighting
- Structural risks from aging infrastructure
- Insufficient fire alarms, exits, or extinguishers
- Poorly designed furniture causing strain
- Hazardous substances in science/engineering labs
- Electrical system faults
- Ergonomic issues from poor workspaces
- Overcrowding, increasing risk in emergencies
- Poorly marked escape routes
- Inadequate cleaning spreading bacteria
- Pests from poor waste management or maintenance
- Other environmental and safety risks

Corrective Action in Education Facilities Health and Safety Concerns

- SACPCMP's Six Critical Stages:
- Inception: Identifying OHS risks early
- Concept & Feasibility: Designing for safety and sustainability
- Design Development: Integrating OHS into layouts and materials
- Tender & Procurement: Ensuring contractor compliance with OHS laws
- Construction: Managing risks and safe practices
- Close-Out: Final OHS checks and ensuring long-term safety

Appointing a registered CHSA ensures all stages are met for safe, sustainable, and eco-friendly educational facilities

Sustainable Construction and Long-Term Health Benefits

- Healthier learning environments lead to better educational outcomes
- Sustainable buildings reduce long-term operational costs
- OHS measures reduce injuries and ensure compliance with legal obligations

Conclusion

- In summary, OHS is essential for maintaining safe, healthy, and sustainable educational environments
- South African OHS Act and standards provide a framework for safe construction, design, and management of facilities
- By integrating ergonomics, green design, and hazard control universities can foster a safe and productive learning environment

At Diba BES, we lead in OHS design, construction, and maintenance, ensuring compliance with the South African OHS Act. Our strong partnerships with clients, the Department of Employment and Labour, SACPCMP, and other stakeholders ensure that all projects meet high standards of safety, health, and sustainability. We deliver environments that are safe and promote long-term well-being and productivity.

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