

On the occasion of the opening of the Diepsloot Fire Station

09 November 2007

SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF JOHANNESBURG, CLR AMOS MASONDO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE DIEPSLOOT FIRE STATION, DIEPSLOOT - JOHANNESBURG

Working together to ensure access to Emergency Management Services

Programme Director
MMC for Public Safety: Thomas Phakathi
Members of the Mayoral Committee
Fellow Councillors
Managers and Officials of Council
The Media
Members of the Community
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to share this day with you and be part of this very important event - the opening of the Diepsloot Fire Station. This is part of our effort to bring Emergency Management Services, part of service delivery, closer to where people are located. In this City, we believe that local action, such as this initiative, goes a long way towards the creation and the building of safe and sustainable communities.

This new fire station will not only serve the community of Diepsloot. It will also address the needs of areas such as Mnandi as well as the N14 Pretoria Krugersdorp highway.

We need to remind ourselves that before the construction of this fire station the EMS centres had to serve this area from as far away as Lonehill, Randburg and other distant regional surrounding fire stations. Such a service could only be delivered if the vehicles and other resources were available.

Emergency is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as " sudden state of danger requiring immediate action" ... "a disaster affecting a community".

Anyone who has been involved in a car accident will remember just how sudden it is. In most instances there is no time to do anything. What happens occurs within a split of a second.

Many of us could have heard of the sad story of an old age home that was gutted by fire in some remote area of Kwa-Zulu Natal in the past five days. What makes this tragedy even more disturbing is the fact that the elderly, some of whom could not even walk, were trapped in what appears to be a building that did not comply with basic safety standards. Needless to say that those who died could have had their lives spared if someone had paid attention.

We need to remind ourselves that fires cost lives, they destroys property, and drain public resources.

The Fire Association of Southern Africa makes the following observation:

- A total loss due to fire for the year 1999 stood at about R2.4 billion.
- Burns are the second leading cause of accidental deaths.
- The most affected are residential properties, which account for 76% of all the cases.

Amongst the most vulnerable to fire hazards are the children from 1 to 4 years of age. They also constitute the second largest casualty of burns. Programme Director, I am told that Diepsloot has the following identified risks according to the assessment conducted prior the building of this fire station:

- Fatalities (Pedestrian Vehicle Accidents - PVA)
- Shack fires and
- Drowning

Our fire stations do not only provide fire suppression, they are also meant to:

- Provide information and empower communities,
- Ensure rescue and public education,
- As well as to provide rapid response to medical calls.

This fire station will be providing the following programmes:

- Fire safety - to address the problems of fires in the area particularly in winter.
- Water safety - to address the issue of drowning and floods during the rainy season.
- Community training on First Aid, basic fire fighting, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV and AIDS and skills development.
- Disaster management - to create a state of readiness and ensure that the community is able to respond to disasters,
- Provide special awareness programmes for schools and early childhood development centres.

The City also regularly undertakes various Safety Awareness Campaigns that focus on hazards such as water, open manholes, roads and electricity cables and potential harmful substances under the name Qaphela!

These Campaigns are seasonal, around April just before winter we focus on danger such as fires. In the period leading to summer we focus on hazards such as rivers, swimming pools and thunderstorms.

We also teach people about potentially harmful substances such as paraffin and poisons.

In this City, we believe that because the overwhelming number of cases, whether these be fires or drowning, occur in residential areas, that local involvement is perhaps the most important aspect of public safety education.

We also know that there are many instances where the general public and individuals tends to ignore important warnings given by government institutions and professionals. This is also backed up by global evidence collected on areas in danger of experiencing erupting volcanoes and threatening floods. We need to take such advice seriously and do whatever is

necessary to save lives. One life lost is one life too many. We know from our own experience that from time to time scaremongers and those who peddle rumours emerge from our ranks. These seek to frighten people into a stampede. Such irresponsible acts, as demonstrated by the recent distribution of an sms claiming that a terrible storm was about to hit the Gauteng Province, can do enormous social, political and economic damage to the country and our people.

Programme Director, the City of Johannesburg wishes to take this opportunity to thank Mr Parks Maponya, a neighbour in this community who has pledged an amount of R1.5 million towards the building of an Olympic size swimming pool. This will help to ensure basic training in swimming and rescue diving skills. It is anticipated that this will reduce incidents of drowning by more than 50% in the next two years.

To succeed, we need to work together in partnership. Our overall view is that safety is a collective responsibility. We would also like to take this opportunity to urge members of this community to report the afore mentioned dangers and hazards to the City of Johannesburg on the following telephone number (011) 375- 5555.

Thank you