Greetings!

Sustaining health and safety issues in your business operations

The long rain season is over and we are now heading towards that time of the year commonly referred to as the ‘fire season’. This is the time that follows after the big rains and grass has grown abundantly. When the dry season follows, the grass dries and this poses a huge fire hazard risk. It is against this background that we (Ecotourism Kenya) wish to emphasize on the need for safeguarding health and safety issues at your facility – particularly in reference to fire safety. In 2016 we sent an Eco-byte on this topic. This being a critical concern, we feel the need to lay emphasis on health and safety in this week’s Eco-byte.

It is your responsibility as an employer to provide a safe working environment for your employees and it is also the responsibility of employees to ensure the working environment’s safety is maintained at all times. A clean and safe environment is essential to the health of workers, guests and suppliers, which boosts business and reputation for the entity.

Under Kenya law- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2007(OSHA) - the employer is required to provide their employees, clients and any other stakeholder with a clean, healthy and secure environment when within their business premises, and may be liable for prosecution if they fail to do so. Employers have a duty under both common and statutory law to provide safe working conditions and to take reasonable care to ensure the health and safety of employees.
Further, having a healthy and safe environment at your facility is actually beneficial for your business as it;

- Improves employee retention
- Reduces liability, legal costs and insurance
- Adds value and marketability of your business
- Decreases your facility’s environmental and health impacts

*How can you ensure a healthy and safe environment for your facility? Below are a few guidelines for reference:*

1. First of all, ensure compliance with relevant legislation on health and safety i.e.
   - Annual registration of the business as a workplace with the Directorate of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH)
   - Medical examinations for all food and beverage handlers (kitchen staff) in every six (6) months to ascertain their health fitness and comply with the *Food, Drugs, and Chemical substances Act. Cap 254*
   - Conduct an annual health and safety audit to comply with the general provisions number 11 in the *Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2007*
   - Conduct a fire safety audit in compliance with *Fire Risk Reduction Rules, 2007*

2. There should be a suitable health and safety policy in place to guide the facility operations and demonstrate concern for a safe environment for both staff and guests. The policy should be accompanied by a clear emergency plan with spelt out procedures on fire safety, medical care, evacuation, handling of chemicals and operation of machines.

3. Establish a health and safety committee to spearhead health and safety issues for the facility. This team should be well trained on health & safety, first aid and fire-fighting skills. It should ideally consist of all HODs from the various departments within the business entity.

4. To ensure fire safety;
   - Fire fighting equipment including, fire extinguishers, fire electric alarm, fire blanket in the kitchen, must be strategically placed and easily accessible within the facility. Ensure the fire-fighting equipment is duly serviced, every six months
   - Safety and precautionary signage such as “no smoking”, “highly flammable” must be fixed in strategic areas including the generator room and fuel and gas storage area.
   - Install fire detection equipment e.g. smoke detectors within your facility including guest rooms and staff quarters.
   - Fire assembly points must be clearly and conspicuously marked within the facility. A fire alarm must also be fixed.
   - Conduct fire drills at least on annual basis to monitor and assess the facility fire emergency response and preparedness
   - Ensure your employees (or at least 1/3 of them) are trained on first aid and fire-fighting skills on annual basis
• Ensure there is adequate information on safety procedures availed for all guests and staff which can be included in room information folders or pinned up on notice boards.
• Ensure availability of first aid kits distributed in the major departments such as kitchen, workshop, laundry, staff quarters, main office, etc.
• Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as boots, overall, gloves, ear muff, etc. to the staff. Always confirm that your staff use the PPEs as intended.

Your facility will be rendered a safe environment when you;
• Ensure your facility is regularly inspected for health compliance by the relevant authority.
• Always keep your premises clean and waste properly handled and disposed off
• Ensure food handlers are inspected, certified and allowed to handle food by the relevant authority.

In conclusion, prevention is better than cure. Seek to have precautionary measures in place, because this will save you the cost, effort and time in the event of emergencies. As the Scout motto says “Always be prepared”.