

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

**An informal discussion paper on
Questions and Issues to be aware of when one considers
establishing a
Private Fire Brigade Service
in the RSA**

**Authored on request by and for
SAESI**

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

The current commercial climate in the RSA is that there is low hanging fruit as far as the eye can see. There are opportunities by the gazillion, for the viewer with a keen eye for business. Over the past two decades the services that shifted from the public sector to the private sector included schools, hospitals, ambulance (EMS), policing, mail and postal, and soon electricity will probably follow suit. It is no less true for firefighting 1st response services.

There are also literally hundreds of fire officers leaving the service with good pensions and other investments who are looking for business opportunities. These officers have excellent career skills, but do they possess business pizzazz - that singular attribute that is required to bite the bullet in the face of adversity?

I was approached by SAESI to compile a kind of synopsis on private fire brigade services. It is **as an industry leader and recognised Firefighter Practitioner** and probably because of my involvement in getting Fire Operations (Pty) Ltd established. Fire Ops SA (FOSA in short) has been successfully conducting business in central Gauteng for these past five years. The opinions therefore, I express in this document, are based on my past experience as fire officer and also due to my position as founder/CEO of Fire Ops SA. I held the position of CEO up until December 2021. I am currently the *de facto* fire chief of the company, responsible for all operational matters.

Millions of rands have been spent on legal opinions in this country by both sides of the debate on whether private fire services are 'legal' etcetera. Personally I have never spent a cent on the issue as I do not consider the legal fraternity to be sufficiently enough informed to address this matter; they depend on someone giving them all the base information first. That someone will be you; the person paying them will also be you. The one that will still not have a proper foundation for action will also be you.

Expect plenty push-back when you embark on this journey. There is jealousy looming on all sides of you. The knives will be out. You will be considered 'rogue', an outcast, the loose cannon on deck, a kind of traitor to the cause. Almost every single past associate you worked with in the service will criticize you, they will rub your head in support but kick your shins, they will pretend to be best buddies but at the 'braaivleis vure' you and your operation will be dissected, made fun of, and belittled.

But you know the vision. You have chosen this way. Be of good courage. For every little voice attempting to break you down, there are three former colleagues who, although they are happily retired and do not wish to engage in this kind of business themselves, will always be there to support and encourage you; focus on those connections.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

Where to start this conversation

This is not a book; neither is it an academic assertion, nor even a reference work. It is a conglomerate of thoughts by one who has taken on the very daunting task of establishing a privately owned fire service. Our first assignment was in the middle-east, after which we were lucky enough to immediately sign up with a super corporate company, who is still our client to this day (July 2022).

It is not my personal style to quote regulations and laws and legal opinions and to dissect those to the T; that kind of thing I leave to my more learned friends.

The wish is often expressed that a person would really like to establish a private service; the intent is not always mutual among any number of such individuals; it differs from person to person, but it mostly concerns a desire to maintain a service standard and then to also make profit on the side while we're running a service. Profit is a key phrase here.

One could also say the desire for making a profit is there first, and then also, while we're at it, to offer a good service to the end user, which will hopefully soon be known as our client.

If the desire to make a profit is absent, it is known as social services or aka charity. Now, charity is not business, although business may include acts of charity, such as delivering rescue services on the open national roads in areas where no such services are rendered by government or municipal structures. By virtue of the equipment and skills required rescue operations **are (very) costly**; there is no billing potential and the operator absorbs the losses. But how much can the new entrepreneur lose before the thing will kill your business? And how do you offset non-billing calls to income generating incidents?

Sometimes volunteer efforts are confused with the principles of private services. Oftentimes people really just want to put together a volunteer effort, comprising members who have certain skills and who wish to contribute their time to their communities; this is not the kind of operation discussed in this document.

My style in dealing with most controversial subjects is to ask as many questions as possible. I mostly then attempt to answer the questions, but sometimes the question is left hanging mid-air, for the reader to make up their mind whether they even wish to go there in their reasoning.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

How do I reconcile the very strong desire to serve and to plough back into my community, seeing as I have accumulated all this knowledge throughout my career, on the one hand, with the principle of (raw, unadulterated) profit on the other?

What business model should I consider?

Commercially there is only one possibility and that is to register a proprietary company (Pty) Ltd. That is, if you intend doing business (profit driven).

If you intend doing something for the community on a Volunteer basis, a non-profit may be a better option (NPO or NPC). But be careful that your heart does not guide you in a decision that may soon regret you. Converting a non-profit into a profit-based enterprise has huge (huge) ramifications.

Your foundation has to be solid.

Rescue operations, MVA scene clean-ups and fire operations in informal settlements drain finances; it entails more than simply heroically extricating a victim. On a financial level there's manpower, time, apparatus and equipment committed to a function that has nothing to do with your income model unless you have a rock solid contract with the local authority where you render the service on their behalf and where they pay you for the service.

What are my Constitutional rights in this regard?

As a free citizen of the RSA, I have an undisputed right to conduct business; I have free reigns to institute any sort of service as long as it is not an illegal activity. It is not simply illegal just because some municipal official instructs you to 'stop your illegal activities' simply because they are uninformed (or jealous). Not only does the Constitution grant me this wonderful right, the 2020 White Paper on Fire Brigade Services encourages (no, implores) municipal structures to cooperate with private enterprise to ensure excellent service delivery to the populace.

Are there most basic examples of what a private service could look like?

Scenario One

So the home owner is an older person, wheel chair-bound. You sit there chatting with the person. You are a qualified (professionally registered) firefighter. You happen to have a fire extinguisher in your back pocket (very bulgy I agree). A fire breaks out in the corner of the room. For this person to call the municipal fire brigade will take too long;

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

the fire will get out of control. They ask you to use your resource to extinguish the fire. You do so successfully.

- If you charge them nothing for your skill and knowledge, you are a volunteer; good on you.
- If you charge them 50 cents for the effort (the energy, the knowledge, the know-how) plus the cost of refilling the extinguisher, you're in business. This constitutes a business enterprise; now off you go and do the same for hundreds of others who are not capable of doing it themselves.

Under what authority will the police, or the municipal manager, or the local fire department prevent you from extinguishing the fire? It happens literally hundreds of times in any given week in this country that third parties extinguish car fires and truck fires and veld fires, using their own resources.

Scenario Two

A corporate appoints you and your team of ten skilled firefighter mates to position yourselves on its campus. They provide some fire equipment and you own some equipment. There are fire pumps in the basement of their five buildings on campus; you do not require a fire engine at all; water is sufficiently boosted by the pumps. There are smoke detection systems, sprinkler systems, hydrants and portable fire extinguishment units installed throughout the campus. You have a small base. You have to respond from here to there. 50 meters to the fireman's lift. Three minutes to the 15th floor.

They pay you handsomely. They expect only their pound of flesh. There is no way on earth that the municipal fire service, no matter how brilliant they are, can beat you to the 15th floor. You live on campus. You breathe the campus. You patrol it daily. You test the systems weekly. You cannot possibly 'arrive late'. You're in business.

Under what authority will anyone tell you that this is an illegal activity?

Scenario Three

You have now solicited twenty corporates and ten strip malls for whom you offer similar services. A position of trust has developed. You have now acquired a fire engine (duly registered as an emergency vehicle). You have established a little satellite fire station. All of this has come about due to mistrust the public has in the deteriorated municipal service, and because the clients want first responders who will arrive within the limits of international best practise.

Under what authority will anyone prove this an illegal activity?

You have a Constitutional right to establish a business; the client has a Constitutional right to protect their assets and business to the best of their ability and by any means possible.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

If a fire was detected by a detection system installed by private enterprise, and the sprinkler (installed by private enterprise) has extinguished the fire, and the smoke was automatically extracted by a system also installed by private enterprise, and the municipal fire service has done nothing to contribute to this success, was not this too private initiative?

And yet, the municipal structures insist that these systems must be installed.

What is your true motivation for wanting to start the company?

Our career paths developed mostly based on the premise we wanted to serve people. Some call it saving lives, some say we protect property, some spent time around the posse just to keep busy, spinning their wheels in the mud for a few years, and then left, not knowing what they were there for.

Some developed academically; some developed vocationally.

Does the Fire Brigade Services Act impact on my plans?

The Act is outdated, incomplete, unsupervised and hopelessly inadequate. The current white paper (2018) is more of a political script than what it will serve the country. Specialist fire services such as aviation, petro-chemical, forestry, sea faring vessels, etcetera, are not only neglected, they are altogether ignored. There is no link between the fire safety inadequacies of the National Building Regulations and the informal environment, yet the latter is the terrain where most fire deaths are experienced.

(In the context of this document it is necessary that you keep in mind that, despite all the push-back you'll get from your local authority, there will be this very strong, very unfair expectation that you will (must) fight fires in informal settlements, without any compensation. When you determine your company policies and philosophies, you need be firm in your decisions and then keep to them through thick and thin.

If you decide you are going to do this as part of your community responsibility, you'll be expected to see it through – do not ever start something that is not sustainable).

For those of us who were responsible for the first (base) comments when the Act was first compiled and those still alive who served on the then Fire Brigade Board, the intent was far different from what it is made out to be today. There were two primary thoughts in the act namely: (1) a municipal authority that had a fire brigade at the time of the act being promulgated, was compelled to maintain that service at the standard at which it was at the time, and (2) it was aimed at services conducted by the municipal structure.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

What precisely is meant by ‘designated service’?

There were really professional services created by and managed by entities such as Pelindaba, Eskom, SASOL, Sappi, privately owned air ports (such as Lanseria) and plenty more, where the risk was of such a nature that the entity had to protect its own. The Fire Brigade Board could be approached by these entities for registration as ‘designated services’. The municipal structures were not considered in the application! It was a matter between the applicant and the Board. This said Board was dissolved (or declared – as the EMS colleagues call it) around 2009. The provinces then, by mouth of the Disaster management Centres ‘sommer’ assumed this specific role of the then defunct Board. *Since then to date there is one private service that had been granted ‘designated’ status in KZN. No other entity were ever in the good position again to gain this status, mainly due to the political approach where all and sundry have to first be consulted before a decision can (will) be taken.*

Entities such as Lanseria Airport, SASOL, SAPPI, ESKOM, etc. are simply maintaining their services at the standards they have created for themselves.

Consider the petro-chemical environment; there is no way on this good earth the municipal ‘services’ can even imagine fighting fires in highly specialised environments such as bulk tank farms and the like. The same municipal authority will let you know if you want to establish a fire service for their (their?) town, that you may not do so, yet they daily draw on these corporate fire brigades to do their work (also private services, right?).

It is necessary to understand this background; else you’ll be spooked every time a local fireman blows down your neck.

Is there still a Fire Service Board?

This has been dealt with; the Board has been dissolved (or run into the sand due to the fact it served no real further purpose at the time).

Does my fire company need to be recognised by COGTA?

No. There is no legal obligation for you to approach COGTA for a permit or a license or for written permission to conduct business.

Do I need to be recognised by my local authority at all? (The Authority Having Jurisdiction).

No.

Your offering will be aimed at a private household, business, office park, mall, warehouse, factory, power station or forest management company, to list just a few. If these same entities contract with security companies to conduct security work for them *despite the SA Police Services Act*, and if those same companies contract with EMS

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

offerings for their staff (instead of depending on municipal or provincial services), then it's considered to be okay.

Surely the homeowner has a say in who they want to protect their home?

Surely the owners of a chemical production plant may on the insistence of its insurer, decide to contract professional fire protection?

All (all) municipal fire departments in the RSA have abdicated their primary fire safety role to fire consultants and fire engineers. They refer architects and engineers to these consultants and fire engineers in their droves! Yet, on the other side of the wall, in the engine bay, there is the notion that no matter how poor the service has become, no-one dare serve the community.

In some instances your client will be site specific, such as a power station or a forest or a university campus or an airport. Who's permission do you need for this offering?

Need I seek cooperation with my local authority fire service?

Absolutely yes; nothing trumps cooperation. And you will get it, especially at grass roots level; where the tires hit the tar. Remember, you're not planning a tow-truck offering; you're not going to speed down the main roads at 200 miles per hour. This is not going to be cheap-skate rushing and pushing for attention. You have either signed up the client and you hold a proper mandate, or you have not.

Will the service be limited to one client, such as a corporate? Will it be one town, one city, one province? – or will it be national?

Easy now! We need to crawl before we can walk.

Are you able to sign up one client? Say one household. Have you tried convincing a family they need your brilliant fire service (without scandalising the municipal service)?

- How will you approach the family?
- What will you tell them about your service?
- How will you convince them of your (personal) professionalism?
- What is on offer here: 1st response? Weekly, monthly, quarterly visits to consult them and keep them on the fire safety straight and narrow?
- Are these proposed visits included in your fee?
- What is the fee?
- Is it due monthly? Do you have a debit order facility?
- Is it due annually?
- What are the benefits of these two potentials?

Here we have a chicken-and-egg situation. It is difficult (impossible) to sell an idea only, if you have not established a service yet. Families want to see fire engines.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

Companies want to see company profiles and policy documents and quality control measures and staff and equipment inventories. Does it sound difficult? Well, it should because it is.

So back to the question, then; if you can sign up one household, you can do a thousand. If you can convince one company, you can sell to one hundred. If you can do one town, you can do a city, but easy now, if you run ahead of yourself you'll grow to fast (mostly in your head and not in the bank account). Roundup is a pesticide; but it does not kill weed because it's a poison. It kills weed because it is a super-growth hormone. The plant grows itself into the ground in a few days. (Cash flow is paramount).

What role should I, as the primary founder, play in the company?

You need a career officer to be in charge of the company for many years. The one with the dream is that person; it sounds like it may be you, the reader. Maintain control of the company for as long as possible. Be the CEO, MD, chief, cook, bottle washer, nappy-liner procurer, fireman, and whatever else is required. Do not relinquish control. Whether you start with no cash at all (we did) or with someone else's money, do not lose grip on managing your business. One signature, one bank controller, one buyer, one chief – you!

You have heard it said a company will (hopefully) show profit after five years of being well managed. Forget about all the normal excuses you hear when a company has failed: oh, and then covid struck us (you know, the '19'), and then the property market went bang, and then my grandmother died, and then and then. Don't be pampered, this is where lions roar and kittens meow. (I purposefully spelt covid in the lower case so you will forget about it as an excuse).

If the enterprise is successful you will want to take the credit; if fails, be strong enough to take the responsibility. Times are tough.

Will I eventually be appointing a Board of Directors?

Yes, you will eventually appoint directors, and you should be one yourself. At this stage you will be some three years into the exercise. You will require cash injections and guarantees and credit lines and serious bookkeeping and auditing support. You will need quality control managers and people who are knowledgeable in HR, etc. You cannot possibly be all things to all people.

At this point you should consider appointing a qualified fire chief (3-year diploma + 15 years as a senior officer in a large brigade), as you will be required to attend to running the company and expanding the service offering. You are an executive and you will deal with the likes of CEO's of insurance companies, facilities management groups, etc.

Scalability

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

If the plan is not scalable, it is dead in the water. This is not a mom-and-pop deal. This is not the time to test basic entrepreneurial skills; if that's the idea then you should rather try your hand at something else. Many thousands of people will eventually be beholden to your offering; failure is not an option. One of the strong motivators in starting up a new business is to build it into a giant enterprise *and to then sell it off*.

Senior officer structure: how do we determine the need?

We in Fire Ops SA created a very strong top layer first; all of those officers are still with us after a full five years now. Here I refer to Deputy Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs and Battalion Chiefs. We then appointed Lieutenants (Company Commanders). From these Lt's we later promoted some to Captain, but only after the first firefighters were appointed. You are probably (also) going to need senior support before you even need to have firefighters. All FOSA officers are working officers, in other words, they have operational responsibilities.

Am I still of such an age that I can spend at least eight very active years in the company, giving guidance, determining policies, constructing SOP's?

That's the 64-million dollar question. Age and beauty are both in the eye of the beholder. You are going to sink capital, time and energy by the truck-loads into this effort. You obviously have to consider your current age and whether you gauge you may still make it, all things considered. I do not think there is either an ideal or a maximum age at which to kick-start a new business.

Is there any value in having the company accredited in the ISO9001 system?

Quality control is immensely important, both for your own sake and also for your corporate type clients. FOSA is ISO9001:2015 accredited even to the point the fire and rescue operations are specifically detailed in the registration. It is immensely costly and time consuming to establish and maintain it; but it grants you bragging rights beyond comprehension.

How will you raise capital for the start-up?

It is difficult for me to guess what you have in mind. Registering the company and doing the basic footwork to get it going as a business concern may require less than you may imagine. You do not need massive offices or a fire station or new fire engines. Likewise, you do not want to start doing business publicly from your home office. A well-positioned mini warehouse may suit all your initial requirements, and in addition you will have excellent security.

Banks will not help you (I do not mean in your personal capacity); I mean the company. Banks care little for your challenges and whether you opine it will be a success. There is a lesson in this really; banks do not take on any risk, and neither should you – unless you have a really strong appetite for risk and unless you know precisely how to determine healthy risk profiles.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

Capital may best be raised from relatives or friends who have faith in your abilities to manage and expand a business. It is unlikely you'll find an investor who will not want to take up an immense chunk of shareholding, and the shares are worth zilch for at least two years, when the first financials are prepared by the auditors.

How do I determine the intrinsic value of a share?

All proprietary companies - (Pty) Ltd – companies are registered with 100 shares; it is considered to have a base value (it used to be called '*pari value*') of R1-00 each. So the newly registered company (a shell really) is worth R100. A few years into the operation auditors will determine the share price based on cash in hand, debtor's book, value of the assets register, fixed contracts, etc.

What influence will union activities have in my company if it is allowed to operate?

This is a politically loaded question. Unions killed the municipal services, and it will do the same in your service. There is a simple way of preventing unions from even coming onto your floor: treat people fairly, pay them a living wage (or better) and promote form in your own ranks. Do not fear the issue; manage it.

Short questions & answers

- *How will I afford accommodation? – Satellite stations, offices, workshops, stores, etc.*
 - Make your best attempt to get an industrial or commercial client allow you the use of their space; in return they get a hefty discount on their 1st response cover. If an industrial client is billed say, R30,000 per month, you could negotiate a premium of say R8, 000, off-set against the original premium. There, you now have a satellite facility at no direct cost to you.
- *What kind of apparatus do I require? This needs to be based on very specific policies of tactics.*
 - To begin with, please forget about Turn-table Ladders and platforms and Quints, or even fancy new fire engines.
 - At the same time however: put the idea of a little Bean pump on the rear-end of a bakkie quite out of your mind. (If bakkies could do it then the security companies can do it).
 - Ideally see if you can sign up a major industrial or corporate client first. These entities normally have well-established water networks and pumps and you rarely need to have a fire engine in order to service them. Well-distributed fire points with hoses, nozzles, BA's and break-in hardware will suffice while you are improving on the plan.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

- *What will the fleet cost me?*
It's like asking 'how long is a piece of string'? It all depends on your philosophy or fire attack policies.
- *How do I finance the fleet? Can I rent the fleet?*
Fleet rental is probably the surest way of getting the fleet started. There are at least two fleet management companies in Gauteng where you could get going with used apparatus at affordable prices; you'll be required to put up equity guarantees though.
- *What about affordability of equipment?*
If you plan really well and if you make enough inquiries, you can get equipment at affordable prices. The idea is to get going.
- *What is the profile of the end user I'll eventually call my client?*
Go big or go home; attempt to sign as many industrial clients and corporates as you possibly can. These clients are willing to pay R8k to R35k and much more, provided your offering makes sense and is well presented.

Residential clients will be your main publicity partners. If you please them they will tell all and sundry about your excellent service.

Insurance companies and security companies make good partners and are prepared to negotiate a flat rate service offering provided your footprint is really well defined. Be prepared to sign residences from R60 per month to as low as R5.80 per front door, provided the client brings a few thousand front doors to the contract. An insurer with say 20, 000 policies buying into your offering will make a substantial contribution to the budget.

The challenge here is not (even) soliciting business; the challenge is that both you as an individual, and (also) your company must exude confidence.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

- *Am I supposed to have a firefighting philosophy before I start the company?*
If there is a subject in the world in which a post-grad student can do their PhD, then there is a philosophy attached to it. This is all too true for fire operations. Without precise philosophies, policies and doctrines, there is no way the new venture will be successful.
- *How does billing work?*
It is important to understand your main income stream will not even be the monthly service fees your clients pay you, but rather the fee you will charge for suppressing or extinguishing a fire. So, over and above the monthly retainer, the client will still be billed when you attended a fire; this bill they forward to the insurer, who will cover you, provided the bill is not ridiculously high. I would suggest you appoint a sharp bookkeeper and equip her with the best bookkeeping software you can afford.
- *Do I require debit order facilities?*
You will mostly invoice your bigger clients monthly. The smaller ones may be a challenge and debit orders may seem like the right tool. A debit order system requires a truck-load of administration. Although we at FOSA do keep a debit order system (historical), we overcame the challenge by having households register through our website and paying by credit card, one year in advance (R900). Next year the system will pick up on the reminder and repeat the transaction automatically.
- *What services are the more lucrative ones to have on offer?*
Fire operations to begin with, pure and simple.
Then consulting work.
- *What service offerings should I not touch with a barge pole?*
EMS
HAZMAT
Rescue (typical street work: MVA etc).

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

What qualifications should the first responders have?

You will need to appoint a fire chief, as a starting point. The qualifications of such a person ought to be a SAESI Diploma (Associate or Grad) or NDip, and twelve to fifteen years in a senior capacity in a large brigade.

Your senior officers (staff officers) all need to have these qualifications, with a varying requirement on years' experience.

Captains and Lieutenants should hold at least a Senior Fireman Certificate or equal.

All of the above ought to register with a professional body. The only registration I am acquainted with is SAESI.

Firefighter qualifications depend on your fire engagement philosophy. I am not expanding on philosophies here, except to state that as a private concern you ought to do things drastically different from what you were used to in the municipal service, as you do not have the novelty of authority.

There is the question of discipline

Universally, the principle of discipline is viciously attacked, with the protagonists believing the world can operate under severely restricted control; the idea of hierarchies is viciously pushed back on.

Fire operations require hierarchies and strict discipline. It is compulsory for a service to be in uniform and to be managed following a strict disciplinary code. If your personal conviction opposes this statement, then establishing the proposed fire service is not for you. Discipline must be of the highest order. Your officers need to be really committed to the cause. I have written a paper on fire department discipline (the reader can request it at any time).

Labour legislation

It's strict; it's well developed and precise. Do not challenge it by making up your own rules. You will attract undue attention and will open your company up to union interference.

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

HAZMAT: to do or not to do

My basic instinct remains that you should determine what your core service offering is going to be. Cleaning up an MVA site after the trucks have been towed away is one matter; it should be done by the fire crew.

But HAZMAT clean-up operations include a number of sub-disciplines and are very costly (due to the speciality nature and the equipment required). ISO accreditation is dealt with differently and the environmental requirements one is expected to comply with are multiple and complicated.

Who will be responsible for the training and or standards maintenance of the first responders?

Training as an internal activity needs to receive massive amounts of attention. There needs to be a strict daily routine which must be followed to the T, from Monday to Sunday. Staff should be encouraged to better themselves and to exercise continuous improvement. Here is the myth that the employer is responsible for continuous improvement; it is a false perception.

If you have appointed someone in the position of firefighter and they are qualified for the position, they can serve you as such for the next twenty years without promotion if it depended on you as employer. An individual needs to work for promotion. That means the person ought to put in effort and energy to prove they are worthy of promotion.

There are three very distinct levels of development namely: inter-company improvement (daily lectures and drills), academic and vocational. The former is what ensures the crew will keep on doing what they are supposed to (fight fires). The latter are intended as promotion yard sticks.

Any brigade of note will have at least two well-skilled instructors. Note the importance of the word 'skill' here. I am referring to individuals who have gained in-depth insight in matters such as fire-ground operations, fire-ground safety, communication, RIT/MAYDAY procedures, ventilation and the utilisation of water mist under extreme pressure.

Must they have any prescribed association in order to be a first responder, such as a registered Health Professionals Council of South Africa or other industry Professional Bodies?

In any vocation the person who is professionally registered draws the attention of the employer first when appointments or promotions are considered. Firefighters are not beholden to the health Professionals Council at all. SAESI is the most advanced professional body for the registration of firefighters. There is the notion that station representatives must almost do all the work the help individuals along to registration;

PRIVATE FIRE SERVICE COMPANY ESTABLISHMENT

there will be that one person who does it under their own steam – that's the one to watch in future.

There is a very important point that needs discussion here: EMS

Firefighting and fire safety are two very distinct career paths, to begin with.

Firefighting and EMS have absolutely nothing in common (shock to the system!).

We all get seriously worked up when private ambulance services even hint they are going to engage in firefighting operations. We get equally upset if the security industry hints that just maybe they too, could fulfil the fire 1st response service.

The reason it irks us is that we are so convinced that firefighting requires special personality traits, special skills, and special qualifications etcetera.

Extracting a victim from a car wreck is not the same as receiving the victim from the rescuers and attending to the life safety aspects of the Now patient). When a fire crew extracts a person from a fire building we refer to that individual as a 'victim'. When EMS receives the victim at the front door it becomes their 'patient'. Patient treatment and transportation should be very far removed from the mind of the entrepreneur who considers founding a firefighting operation.

EMS is subject to serious limitations from the department of Health.

Determine what it is you want your company to specialise in and then focus on that.

THE END