

**Keynote address by the Executive Mayor of Mopani District Municipality,  
Councillor Nkakareng Rakgoale during to the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual National Fire Safety  
and Prevention Seminar at the Tzaneen Country Lodge on Wednesday, 27  
February 2019**

**Programme director**

**All Mayors present here**

**Officials from the National Disaster Management Centre led by the DDG, Dr  
Mmaphaka Tau**

**Professionals from our institutions of higher learning**

**Officials from the host district, in particular our Chief Fire Officer**

**Distinguished guests**

**All delegates**

**Members of the media**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

Good morning

It is with great humility for me to be addressing delegates to this august gathering – the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual National Fire Safety and Prevention Seminar. We are particularly pleased as Mopani District Municipality to be the host of this year's edition.

Ladies and gentlemen

In September last year, we lost three of your colleagues during a blaze at the Bank of Lisbon Building in Johannesburg, and seeing the images from that

tragic incident has traumatized me for days. During the same month we also lost Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa who had a strong passion on the preservation of the environment. In December last year, we sadly lost three lives here in Tzaneen when shacks caught fire at the Talana hostel, where their bodies were burnt beyond recognition. Let's all rise and observe a moment of silent in honour of their lives.

Our District Disaster Management Team as led by the dedicated Mr Hanes Steyn has also had to deal with a lot of traumatic situations in the recent past. I have experienced first-hand the trauma that many of you are exposed to on a daily basis. My district team worked so hard to retrieve the body of an 18-month-old baby who fell into a borehole pit at Joppie village in November last year, a very painful incident that will stay in my memories for years to come. More recently, they also had to respond to a car crash that claimed the lives of six people along the R71 road leading to Phalaborwa.

We mourn these and other lives lost around the country, but their lost lives should serve as a reminder of our commitment to endeavour at all times to strive towards continuously improving community safety.

This may also be an opportune moment for me to salute the sterling work done by Mopani Fire and Rescue Services and the rest of you for the excellent work you do in our communities across the country. Government appreciate your commitment and continued readiness to serve the people of South Africa at all times.

I have browsed through some of the topics for discussion at this seminar, and I'm convinced that these four days shall not be a waste of time. It should provide you with new insight and knowledge to apply in your workplace pertaining to fire safety and prevention. Delegates must emerge from this

seminar better equipped with innovative ways to improve on fire safety, which should assist us to save our lives and that of the citizens of this country, as well as minimizing damage to properties.

We must always strive for improvement around issues of fire safety, because the extent of damage to which the fire may cause is largely dependent on our level of response to fire incidents. If we are sloppy and clumsy, it can result in lost lives that would ordinarily have been saved.

Programme director

Apart from lost lives, the cost of fires in South Africa is too high, hence all spheres of government need to work together to reduce these losses. In 2016, the Fire Protection Association of Southern Africa (FPASA) noted financial losses that incurred nationally as exceeding R3,1 billion. This figure only reflects fires attended to by Fire Services and reported to the Association thus largely excluding uninsured losses and fires which occurred in areas where no professional fire services exists. This is a matter that this seminar should pause and reflect on, because our economy cannot continue to suffer these losses when we are faced with a bigger challenge of unemployment.

In our district municipality, different local municipalities are affected differently by fire and rescue work. The Greater Tzaneen Municipality, which has won many national awards in the greenest town competition receives more requests for assistance in dealing with wildfires during the fire season, along with Modjadjiskloof in the Greater Letaba Municipality. It is also within the catchment area of these two fire stations that high-value pine plantations are found, which are extremely vulnerable to fire. Rapid response to any reported fire could potentially save millions of rand and prevent job losses for our people.

Rapid development over the last few years has seen the growth of urban, industrial and commercial sites, placing additional responsibility on each of our five stations across the district. We sometimes find that developers are reluctant to adhere to applicable fire safety and prevention norms and standards required. We will however, not tolerate non-compliance.

Of course with all these developments, comes a greater pressure on fire services to keep pace, and this means there is a growing need for us to expand on our current fire stations to meet the demand and to comply with applicable national standards.

We are aware of the challenges encountered by our fire and rescue services, particularly in our district. Challenges that are related to shortages of personnel, equipment and PPEs are being looked at by the relevant directorate in the district municipality. We have recently appointed fire-fighters which should bring us closer to the required standards. We are also confident that the recently reviewed organizational structure which was adopted by Council last month, will also address staffing within the fire and rescue unit. We should be able to plan better and allocate sufficient resources to replace and maintain our equipment and also ensure that there is adequate protective clothing for our team.

Ladies and gentlemen

Public education and capacity building has been given considerable impetus on the establishment of the Public Information Education Relation (PIER) Unit, which derives its existence from the National Disaster Management Framework. The aim is to educate the public on issues related to fire safety. Through this platform, we hope to significantly reduce fire and safety risk

within the District by joining hands with our communities, particularly our vulnerable rural communities.

We are proud that the Tzaneen Fire Station Divisional Officer, Beryl Monakisi is not only the chairperson for Mopani, but also for the entire province of Limpopo. We understand that currently, there are budgetary constraints in this regard, and pledge to engage all relevant stakeholders in order to find ways of supporting this very important fire prevention strategy.

I also wish to express my support for the Mopani Fire Prevention Strategy and Structure. Together with the team and management, we should be able to engage in a debate on the best model to best address the issue around shortage of personnel within the Fire and Rescue Unit. My ultimate wish is to see Mopani Fire and Rescue Services complying with the national standards, and for this team to continue to be the best in the country.

I will also use appropriate platforms to engage the MEC for CoGHSTA for him to expedite the establishment of a dedicated Fire Services Focal Unit, which will oversee and coordinate fire services in the province. At the level of IDP Rep Forums and Inter-Governmental Relations Forums, we should be able to engage on ways in which we can expand our fire stations or training facilities.

Programme director

Let me take this opportunity to also appreciate and request all the speakers who are here today to share their experience and insight with delegates of this 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the National Fire Safety and Prevention Seminar.

As Mopani District Municipality, our vision is “To be a food basket of Southern Africa and Tourism destination of choice.”

The district is renowned for its abundance of wildlife, including the “Big Five.” We provide easy access to the Northern Section of the Kruger National Park. We are part of the great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, the park that combines South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Home of the Boabab tree confirmed to be the biggest in the world with a height of 24 metres and the circumference of 39 metres.

We have a population of just of over 1,2 million people. We are the biggest exporter of tomatoes in South Africa, and we produce over 90% of South Africa’s tomatoes through ZZZ. We are one of the biggest producers of avocados, mangoes and bananas in South Africa, so don’t make a mistake of leaving without some of our finest bananas and mangoes.

Our host local municipality is the Greater Tzaneen Municipality, also known as the Tropical Paradise of Limpopo. The municipality has won many cleanest and greenest town awards. We have Greater Giyani, which is the seat of Mopani District Municipality renowned for Mopani worms which is known for its nutritious quantities, we have Ba-Phalaborwa to the east, which offers the gateway to the Kruger National Park, we have Maruleng Municipality where in the tourism and the home of the wildlife, Hoedspruit is located and Greater Letaba Municipality – the home of the Rain Queen. This simple highlight the fact that there is an environment that needs to be protected against fire at all times.

Your visit to the district coincides with the hosting of Marula Festival in the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality. This coming Saturday, there is a Jazz and gospel

festival, which I would implore you to join and enjoy our marula drink and other products made from the actual marula tree.

With these few words, let me wish you a wonderful seminar, characterized by meaningful engagement on how best we improve on issues of fire safety and prevention in our country. I hope you enjoy your stay in our district, and do make time to visit us again to explore in-depth our offerings.

God bless you and I thank you.