

*Press release from Jan de Beer, cell 082 456 3677:*

## **StonCor Africa leads the way in lead-free industrial coatings**

While the SA Paint Manufacturing Associations (SAPMA) urgently awaits pending legislation that will make industrial paints lead-free, one of its members has already been producing lead-free protective and industrial coatings for the past eight years.

Midrand-based StonCor Africa, part of the RPM Performance Coatings global group with headquarters in America, in June 2010 voluntarily introduced the removal of hazardous lead-based pigments and driers from its wide range of Carboline protective and industrial coatings which represent the majority of StonCor Africa's local turnover.

Nico van Eeden, MD of StonCor Africa, says although leaded industrial coatings are still not banned in South Africa, the company realised that the coating of large industrial steel structures with leaded Carboline coatings at customers' sites would pose a threat to the health of their staff and the environment.

"StonCor therefore in 2010 already changed the formulation for Carboline products to meet American and European lead-free specifications. We knew that the removal of lead from our coatings would substantially increase the cost of our raw materials and that the unavoidable higher selling price would harm Carboline's competitiveness in the local market but decided to move to lead-free coatings before we had even learnt that anti-lead legislation was planned locally. Hopefully, the fact that we will already be totally compliant when the new law is applied will restore the competitive edge to StonCor Africa's business," van Eeden states.

Dave Thompson, StonCor Africa's Business Manager – Steel Protection, says from a sales point there are many inherent challenges in producing safer but more expensive coatings. "Our competitors still use lead pigments to make their coatings substantially cheaper so we had to launch a major educational drive among customers to spell out the dangers of leaded paint on structural steel elements. During application and maintenance, toxic leaded residues can end up polluting streams and rivers and leaded paint also endangers the health of staff working close to, and in contact with, the coatings."

Thompson says as far as StonCor Africa's export market is concerned, the decision to go lead-free was non-negotiable as leaded coatings are banned in some of the countries that import StonCor Africa's Carboline coatings. South African steel fabricators who coated their products with leaded Carboline also would have lost their export markets.

Jonathan Starmer, StonCor Africa's Technical Resources Executive; and Sandra Olivier, the company's QA and Colour Manager; who were tasked with the formidable practicalities of the switch-over to lead-free Carboline coatings, say the reformulation and factory preparation posed immense challenges, calling for months of planning back in 2010.

"Even then we encountered some teething problems but our lead-free Carboline coatings production process has now been running smoothly since then," Starmer states.

"It's reassuring to know that legislation will hopefully by next year level the local market's playing fields for StonCor Africa. We sincerely hope the new law will be adequately policed and enforced," Olivier adds.

Deryck Spence, executive director of SAPMA, says that the new legislation - scheduled to be introduced next year or early 2020 - will amend the current Hazardous Substances Act's to stipulate that industrial coatings' lead content should be a maximum of 90ppm – currently there is no restriction at all on the level of lead pigments in industrial coatings. Decorative coatings are prohibited by law to have a lead content of over 90ppm compared to its previous permissible level of 600ppm.

“It is gratifying to see that StonCor Africa took such a pre-emptive stand on a matter SAPMA has long – and passionately - campaigned for. SAPMA has particularly been concerned about the lead levels in industrial paint as there was absolutely no restriction on the amount of hazardous lead it could contain. StonCor Africa's environmental and social responsibility and concern for the consumer are therefore highly commendable – and exemplary to all other producers in South Africa,” Spence adds.

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