

# A GUIDE TO HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WHOLESALE AND RETAIL INDUSTRY

---





Compiled by : Elize Lourens  
Bulelwa Huna  
Eunice Ben

Edited by : Boikie Mampuru

## Purpose of this booklet

To ensure a safe and healthy working environment in the wholesale and retail sector, everyone involved has health and safety duties and responsibilities which are clearly outlined in Sections 8, 13 and 14 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act 85 of 1993. Workers in the retail industry face as many health hazards as people employed in jobs that are generally believed to be more dangerous. Retail jobs require repetitive motions, heavy lifting, long periods of standing and other hazards that can result in injury. Retail workers need to be aware of the risks they face on the job and how to avoid them.

**When planning and carrying out operations everyone is faced with a number of health and safety tasks that have to be tackled, such as:**

- Completing risk assessments
- Selecting suitable equipment for the job
- Ensuring employee health and safety
- Setting out safe working procedures
- Ensuring people are adequately trained
- Supervising the work.

## 1. Typical hazards in the wholesale and retail sector

### 1.1 Indoor air quality and pollution

- Most retail stores are in “closed” buildings, where windows cannot be opened easily and doorway exits are often in remote areas.
- Indoor air pollution is caused by the build-up of vapors, particles, molds, fungus and bacteria in building air
- The indoor sources of these pollutants can be:
  - Cigarette smoke, fuel-fired furnaces, building materials, furnishings, cleaning products, store consumer products, asbestos and pesticides.
  - Molds, spores, fungus and bacteria can accumulate in standing water, wet furnishings, furnace water, and air ducts
  - Meat wrappers can be harmed by the vapors of burning plastic wrap.
- Polluted outdoor air can be drawn into a building via the air intakes. Gases and particles from truck exhaust, as well as other pollutants from the area are common indoor air pollutants. If not monitored, these pollutions can cause severe respiratory ailments. All workplaces where these risks are present need an effective mechanical ventilation system.

**To reduce the likelihood of ill-health as a result of poor indoor air quality, it's important to:**

*A mechanical system must bring in fresh outdoor air, mix it with the air that is already circulating inside the store and distribute the conditioned air to all areas, including stock rooms, via ducts.*

## 1.2 Repetitive motion

- In many areas of a retail store there are workers performing jobs that require repetitive bending and twisting of the hands, wrists and upper body. These tasks often place excessive stress on muscles, tendons, blood vessels and nerves
- Repetitive motions frequently result in conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, ganglion cysts and tenosynovitis. These conditions are serious, causing pain, loss of use of the hands and wrists and permanent damage.

**To reduce the likelihood of injuries as a result of repetitive motion, it's Important to:**

*Reducing twisting and bending caused by poorly designed tools and work stations is the only way to reduce the risk.*



## 1.3 Lifting, carrying and standing

- Lifting is an important part of all retail store work. Cashiers lift groceries during the whole work shift; stock clerks put products on shelves throughout the day, and department store staff stock and retrieve products from stockroom shelves frequently. These tasks contribute directly to the high rates of back injuries, lower back pain, hernias, heart and circulatory problems among retail store workers.

**To reduce the likelihood of injuries as a result of carrying heavy loads, it's important to:**

- *Have Loads that seem too heavy broken down into smaller units so that they are manageable*
- *Mechanical lifting devices for loads that are too heavy. Have a co-worker help if no mechanical device is available*
- *Bring products up to comfortable heights*
- *Avoid awkward postures such as twisting and turning while carrying a load.*

- Standing can cause varicose veins and back fatigue, aching feet and muscle strain, among other ailments.

**To reduce the likelihood of injuries as a result of standing, it's important to:**

*Use anti-fatigue mats made of a soft material, foot rests, stools and chairs that can help to relieve the constant pressure of standing for long periods of time.*

## 1.4 The safety of racking systems

- The requirements for the safe installation of racking may vary according to the type and size of the system
- The safe working load, height, width and construction of the racking should be set by the designers or manufacturers of the total system
- Where racking is likely to be struck by lift trucks and other vehicles, it should be protected
- Removable column guards or guard rails should be used to prevent the truck getting too close to the main structure
- Corner uprights are especially at risk and should be carefully protected and painted in a conspicuous colour.

## Racking systems

### 1.4.1 Racking maintenance

- The collapse of racking systems can lead to death and major injury
- The skill and training of lift truck operators has a great bearing on the amount of damage likely to be caused
- Any damage to racking will reduce its load carrying capacity
- The greater the damage the less its strength will be, until it will eventually collapse even when supporting its normal working load.

**To ensure that a racking installation continues to be serviceable and safe it is recommended that:**

- *Regular planned inspections of racking are carried out to identify and determine the extent of any damage and any necessary remedial action to be taken*
- *Staff is encouraged to report any damage however minor, so that its effect on safety can be assessed*
- *The racking manufacturer and installer should be contacted for advice if there is any uncertainty as to the integrity of the racking system*
- *The racking system should not be overloaded having regard to the safe working load of the system*
- *A log book should be kept for recording inspections, damage and repairs*
- *Where damage is identified that affects the safety of the racking system, the racking should be offloaded and controls introduced to prevent it being used until remedial repair work has been carried out.*

### **1.5 Computer operators and data processors**

- Keyboard operators, telephone operators and other members that use computers come in a variety of shapes and sizes. One size workstation will not fit everyone
- The key to a safe computer workstation is ensuring that it fits the user, is adjustable and comfortable.

**To reduce the likelihood of injuries when using computers and data processors, the following is important:**

- *The keyboard should be detached from the monitor screen. It should be flat or slightly angled. Both should be easily adjustable*
- *The seat pan should be contoured and cushioned*
- *The backrest should support the lumbar region. Foot rests should be provided*
- *Good lighting and space, are also necessary to avoid the risk of repetitive motion illnesses.*

### **1.6 Slips, trips and falls**

- Slips, trips and falls are common causes of injuries in all retail stores. Wet, slippery floors around produce, meat, fish and freezer areas are especially hazardous in grocery supermarkets
- Aisles that are cluttered with boxes and uneven cracked flooring are all hazards commonly found in department stores.

**To reduce the likelihood of injuries when as a result of slips, trips and falls, it's important to:**

*All spills need to be cleaned promptly, and time needs to be allowed to clear clutter and waste from the aisles.*

## 1.7 Chemicals

- Workers in the retail sector can come into contact with potentially hazardous substances through either directly working with them or through indirect means, such as loading and delivery
- Health and safety risks caused by chemicals or working with chemicals may cause the following diseases or injuries:
  - Chemical burns
  - Asthma
  - Allergies
  - Irritant contact dermatitis
  - Skin infections
  - Skin cancers
  - Asphyxiation
  - Reproductive problems.
- Using chemicals safely:
  - Labels on chemical containers can help you to get more information on the chemical product and thus use it safely
  - When you take a look at the label of the chemical container you should find information that would tell you if the chemical is explosive, flammable, toxic to humans, harmful or irritating, corrosive or harmful to the environment
  - Manufactures may also include "instruction for use" on the label
  - Always use the chemical as directed by the manufactures and use the chemical for the purpose it was intended for
  - Never decant chemicals into smaller containers before use, without providing a label of the small container that would provide all relevant information about the chemical! This practice of decanting can be very dangerous and has caused many deaths and illness
  - When using harmful chemicals that may cause damage to your skin use gloves and wear a chemical resistant overall
  - When using chemicals that can cause eye damage use safety goggles or when using chemicals that may be dangerous to breathe in, use a respirator.



- **STORING CHEMICALS:**  
**Hazardous chemicals should be stored inside a lockable store or cabinet.**
  - A list of chemical inside the store should be provided. Keep the storage area off limits for unauthorised personnel
  - Different types of chemicals with different properties should be stored separately
  - Do not place heavy containers and large containers on high shelves.
  - Do not store chemicals with food and drinks
  - Never use food containers for chemical storage
  - Make sure all chemical containers can close properly. Ensure the labels on containers remain legible.
- **HEALTH EFFECTS**  
**If you are concerned that your health may be affected by the use of chemicals, or if you believe that adequate precautions are not taken, you should first approach your supervisor and safety representative with your concerns.**

### 1.7.1 Employee's duty in chemical management

- To protect yourself from the damaging effects of chemicals you should:
  - Use chemicals as directed by the manufactures
  - Wash your hands thoroughly before eating or going home
  - Do not smoke in areas where chemicals are stored or used
  - Ensure the area where chemicals are stored or used are well ventilated
  - Avoid prolonged skin contact with harmful chemicals
  - Wear personal protective equipment when needed
  - Take care of personal protective equipment – do not modify
  - Keep your work area clean and free from clutter
  - Read the labels of chemical containers
  - Dispose empty chemical containers in a safe manner.





### 1.7.2 Employer's duty in chemical management

- To ensure that all possible measures are taken to prevent or reduce exposure to the chemicals used, the employer must:

- **Step 1:** List all the hazardous chemicals used
- **Step 2:** Consider whether there is a need to use each substance in the first place. Stop using those that are not required
- **Step 3:** For each of those substances remaining and for any new cleaning chemicals you later consider, ask your supplier if this is the safest product available or is there a safer alternative, which you should use if it is available. Ask your supplier if you can purchase diluted products in smaller containers that will be easier to use
- **Step 4:** For all chemicals used, record a description of their use, eg. oven cleaner, and a description of the type of hazard they represent, eg. irritant/corrosive/toxic etc (this will be found in the product safety data sheets or product labels). It will include instructions on first-aid measures and advice on what to do in case of accidental spillages. If you do not have this information ask your supplier to provide it. Manufacturers and suppliers of hazardous substances are required by law to provide safety information on their products
- **Step 5:** Consider where and how the chemicals are used or handled. Avoid pouring from and using bulk containers, as these can be heavy and hard to hold. Minimise handling, eg by use of appropriate syphons, pumps etc, use smaller containers, and avoid carrying open containers, especially if floors are wet or slippery.
- **Step 6:** Try to keep chemicals in their original containers and, if decanting, ensure that containers are clearly marked and labelled with the manufacturer's instructions for use. The label should clearly identify the hazards of the substance. This will help to prevent any confusion regarding the contents
- **Step 7:** Consider the safe storage arrangements away from heat, sunlight, foodstuffs and members of the public, especially children. Containers should all have lids and be clearly labelled. Cleaning and disinfecting chemicals should be securely stored. Always check manufacturers' storage instructions, as some products may need to be stored separately from others
- **Step 8:** Ensure all your employees are informed, trained, and supervised in the use of cleaning chemicals. It will not be enough just to issue safety data sheets; you must ensure that your employees understand the hazards and the measures needed to control any risks
- **Step 9:** Take into consideration any of your staff who do not have English as a first language. You must ensure that they clearly understand. Posters or graphics can help as reminders on carrying out the job safely. Remember employees and their safety representatives should be consulted about health and safety issues including the use of cleaning chemicals. They may have experienced problems or come up with solutions that you may not have considered
- **Step 10:** Monitor and review employees' use of cleaning chemicals. Supervisors should observe that they are being used and stored correctly. Ensure new employees are trained.
- **Step 11:** Make sure appropriate protective clothing is available when using the cleaning chemical. This could include eye protection, various types of gloves, facemasks and visors etc. Latex gloves are known to cause reactions and should be avoided. Employees must be trained when and how to use and replace such protection

- **Step 12:** Check first-aid arrangements. Staff should be trained in first-aid actions to take in the event of accidental contact with skin or eyes, and appropriate first-aid provision should be available, eg eyewash bottles. Safety data sheets should be kept in a place known to staff in the event that they need to be referred to in case of spillage or an accident.

## 1.8 Hot/cold temperatures

- Working in workplaces which are too hot or too cold can have a number of adverse effects, including; a fall in concentration levels leading to mistakes being made, work rates going down, and accident levels rising. There are a number of simple steps that employers should follow to ensure that temperature levels are reasonable.

### 1.8.1 Work in hot temperatures

- Ventilation - e.g. opening windows - but if this does not produce continual fresh air then mechanical ventilation should be provided
- Provide air cooling plant/air conditioning
- Shade windows
- Relax dress codes and allow staff to wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes
- Provide cold drinks and allow breaks
- Exposure to heat may aggravate other medical conditions such as high blood pressure or existing heart problems. It may result in heat-related illnesses such as prickly heat, heat exhaustion (fainting), heat cramps or heat stroke.
- Signs and symptoms of heat related illness may include one or more of the following:
  - rashes, muscle cramps, weakness
  - dizziness, fainting, nausea
  - headache.

#### The exposed employees should ensure the following:

- *Wear appropriate clothing (summer and winter uniforms, etc)*
- *Drink water and rest in a cool area*
- *Use ventilation/extraction and air-conditioning systems and inform your employer if they appear faulty*
- *Be aware of emergency/first aid procedures associated with heat related illness*
- *Be aware of heat illness risk factors.*

### 1.8.2 Work in cold temperatures

**Where the workplace temperature is likely to be cold, employers should consider some of the following measures:**

- Enclosing or insulating the product
- Providing standalone heating systems
- Rotating work between cold and warm areas
- Providing warm protective clothing
- Rest breaks in warm areas.

## 1.9 Machine guarding

- Many bakery, deli, meat and fish department workers as well as store carpenters and maintenance staff, use electrical equipment that can cause serious cuts, bruises, amputations, crushed bones and other injuries
- The machines include saws, meat grinders, slicers, mixers, waste balers and garbage disposal units. The moving parts must be guarded to prevent body contact with the machine, and chain mail gloves should be provided for cleaning them
- Moving parts include belt drives, shear points, nip points pulleys, sprockets, blades, saw blades, rotating and flying parts
- In the deli or meat department, blades on the slicing machines must have machine guards to help prevent accidents
- Non-automatic slicers must have a handhold protected from the blade. All slicers must be kept sharp so that force is not necessary. Deli workers should not wear loose clothing, which might get caught in the blades of a machine.

## 1.10 Electricity

- Workers in supermarkets and other retail stores may face hazards from exposure to live electricity. Contact with energised equipment can cause shock, burns, startle accidents and even death
- Electric shock injuries are a danger when retail workers are exposed to live wiring, temporary wiring and damaged electrical equipment, especially when adequate training has not been given
- In supermarkets, slicers, grinders, saws and other electrical appliances have exposed non-current carrying metal parts that can cause electrical shock when used near water
- There is also the potential for shocks during routine maintenance and servicing if electrical lockout and tag out is not used to de-energise the powered equipment
- In supermarkets and other retail stores, exposed temporary wiring and damaged flexible cords can cause injury. Product displays and newly designed areas are frequently installed without permanent wiring.
- Back of the store stockrooms may have damaged wiring, temporary fixtures and obsolete electrical equipment
- Retail workers should visually inspect all electrical wiring regularly to check for breaks, fraying, and other defects. All electric outlet boxes should be covered. All switch boxes and circuits should be labeled.



## 1.11 Waste disposal

- Waste disposal is a hazard that is present in most retail store situations, and it must be dealt with cautiously to ensure that nobody is hurt
- Waste compactors and loading doors should be interlocked with the drive mechanism so that the unit cannot be operated unless the door is fully closed. Balers should have two-handed stop and operating buttons that make you push both buttons simultaneously to operate. This keeps your hands at a safe location and distance from danger
- The feed throat on garbage disposal equipment and grinders should be guarded so that hands cannot come into contact with the moving blades.



## 2. What are the principles outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act?

**The Occupational Health and Safety legislation outlines basic principles, such as:**

- The employer is primarily responsible for the health and safety of employees and must take the necessary protective measures
- All employees must be involved in health and safety issues
- Employees, are also obliged to support the employer's efforts in ensuring a safe and healthy environment
- The Occupational Health and Safety Laws are enforced by the Labour Inspectorate.

### 2.1 Who should be involved in health and safety issues in the workplace?

- Occupational health and safety is a team effort
- It should be addressed by both employer and employees
- It requires constant inter-action between employer, employees and Government.



## 2.2 What is the duty of the employer?

**Every employer shall provide and maintain, as far as is reasonably practicable a working environment that is safe and without risks.**

### **The employer is required to:**

- Provide and maintain a safe system of work
- Identify hazards and evaluate risks
- Take steps to eliminate or mitigate all hazards before resorting to PPE
- Provide information, training and supervision
- Provide the means to apply safety measures
- Not permit employees to work unsafely
- Enforce H&S measures at work
- Ensure that every person on the premises obeys the Act
- Ensure that supervisors have work-related to safety training
- Empower supervisors with authority.

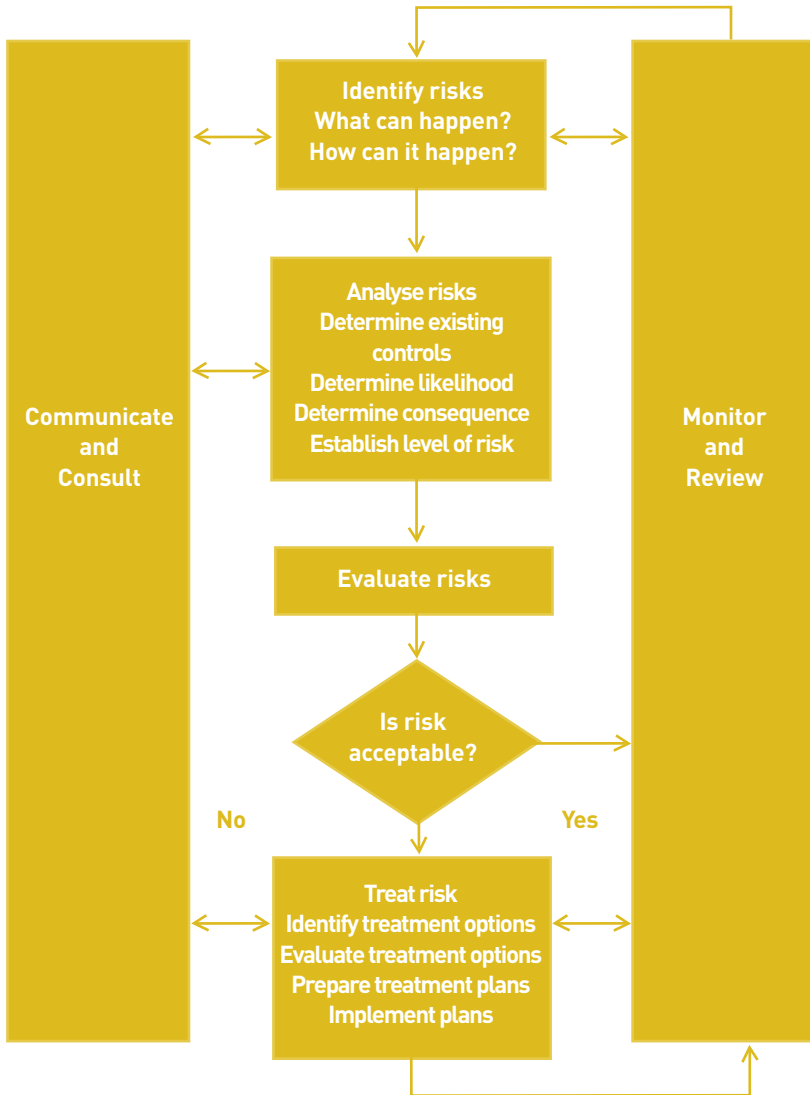
## 2.3 What is the duty of the employee?

**The Occupational Health and Safety Act outlines responsibilities of employees at work. Every employee shall:**

- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions
- Cooperate with the employer to enable him/her to comply with the Act
- Carry out any lawful order, and obey the H&S rules
- Report any unsafe situation to the employer or to the health and safety representative.

## 2.4 Risk assessment

Risk assessment is the process of evaluating the risks to employee's safety and health from workplace hazards. It is a systematic examination of all aspects of the



## Workplace

Figure 1 below depicts a risk assessment process





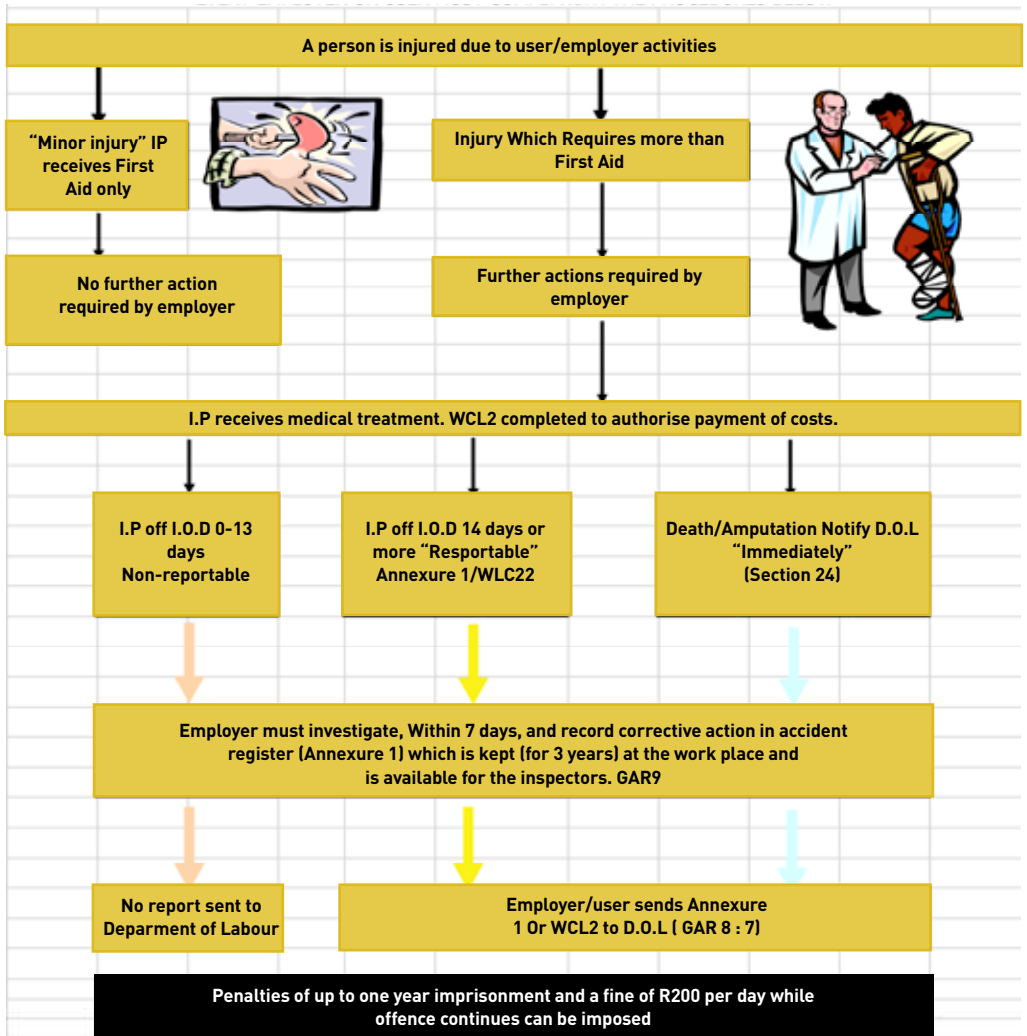
2.5 What is the link between risk assessment, occupational hygiene monitoring and medical Surveillance?

2.6 Reporting of incidents and occupational diseases

All occupational diseases and reportable incidents must be reported to the Department of Labour

### INCIDENT REPORTING PROCEDURE AS PRESCRIBED IN THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

EVERY EMPLOYER OR USER MUST COMPLY WITH THE PROCEDURES BELOW



## Contact Details

### Labour Head Office:

Telephone Number(s): (012) 309 4000  
Email Address:

Fax Number(s): (012) 320 2059  
webmaster@labour.gov.za

### Provincial Offices:

#### Eastern Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (043) 701 3128

Fax Number(s): (043) 722 1012/  
Fax Number(s): (043) 743 9719

#### Free State Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (051) 505 6200

Fax Number(s): (051) 447 9353

#### Gauteng Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (011) 853 0300

Fax Number(s): (011) 853 0470

#### KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (031) 366 2000

Fax Number(s): (031) 366 2300

#### Limpopo Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (015) 290 1744

Fax Number(s): (015) 290 1608

#### Mpumalanga Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (013) 655 8700

Fax Number(s): (013) 690 2622

#### North West Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (018) 387 8100

Fax Number(s): (018) 384 2745

#### Northern Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (053) 838 1500

Fax Number(s): (053) 832 4798

#### Western Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (021) 441 8000

Fax Number(s): (021) 441 8135

or

### Labour Head Office:

Telephone Number(s): (012) 309 4000

Email Address: webmaster@labour.gov.za

### Provincial Offices:

#### Eastern Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (043) 701 3128

#### Free State Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (051) 505 6200

#### Gauteng Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (011) 853 0300

#### KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (031) 366 2000

#### Limpopo Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (015) 290 1744

#### Mpumalanga Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (013) 655 8700

#### North West Provincial Office

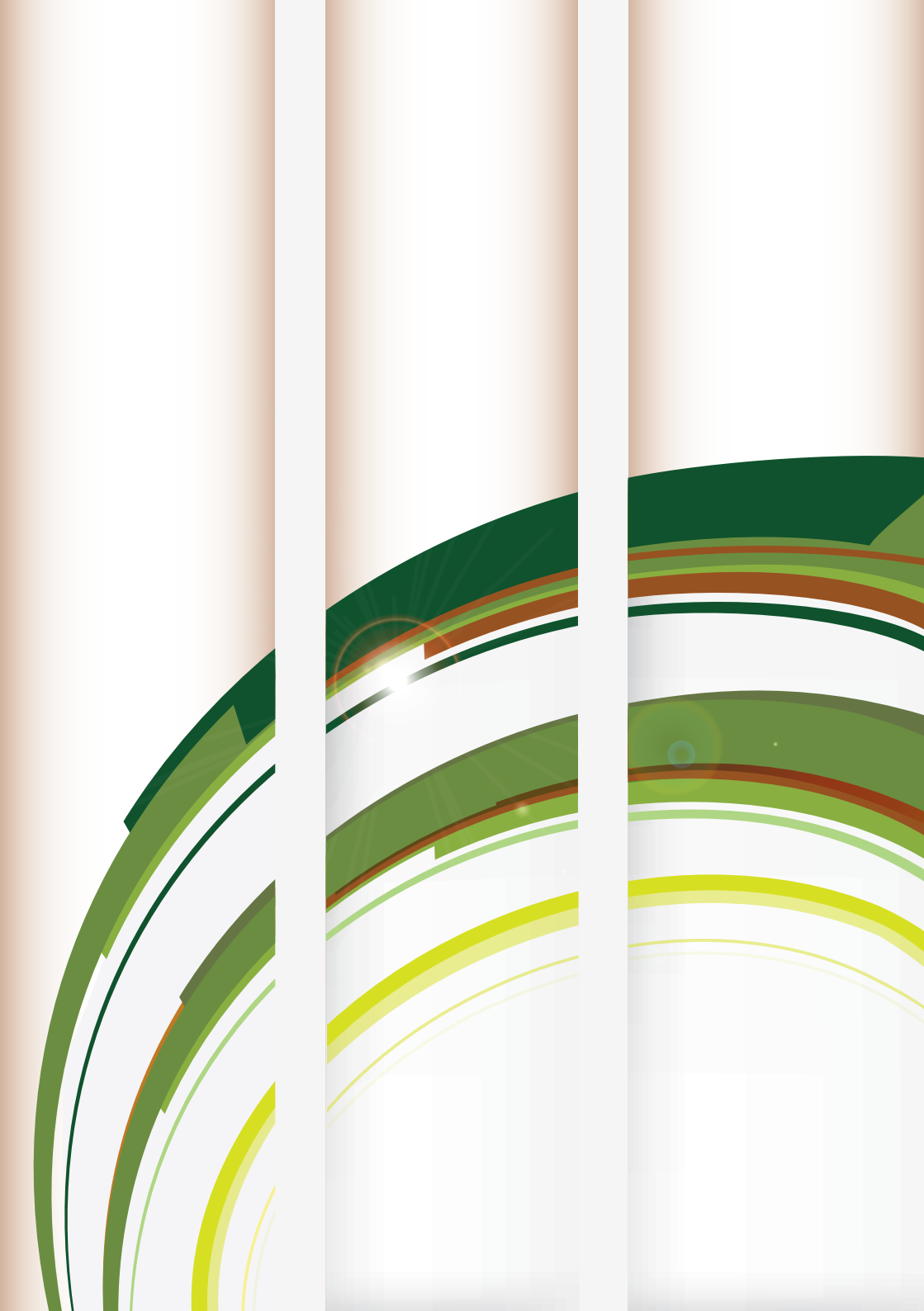
Telephone Number(s): (018) 387 8100

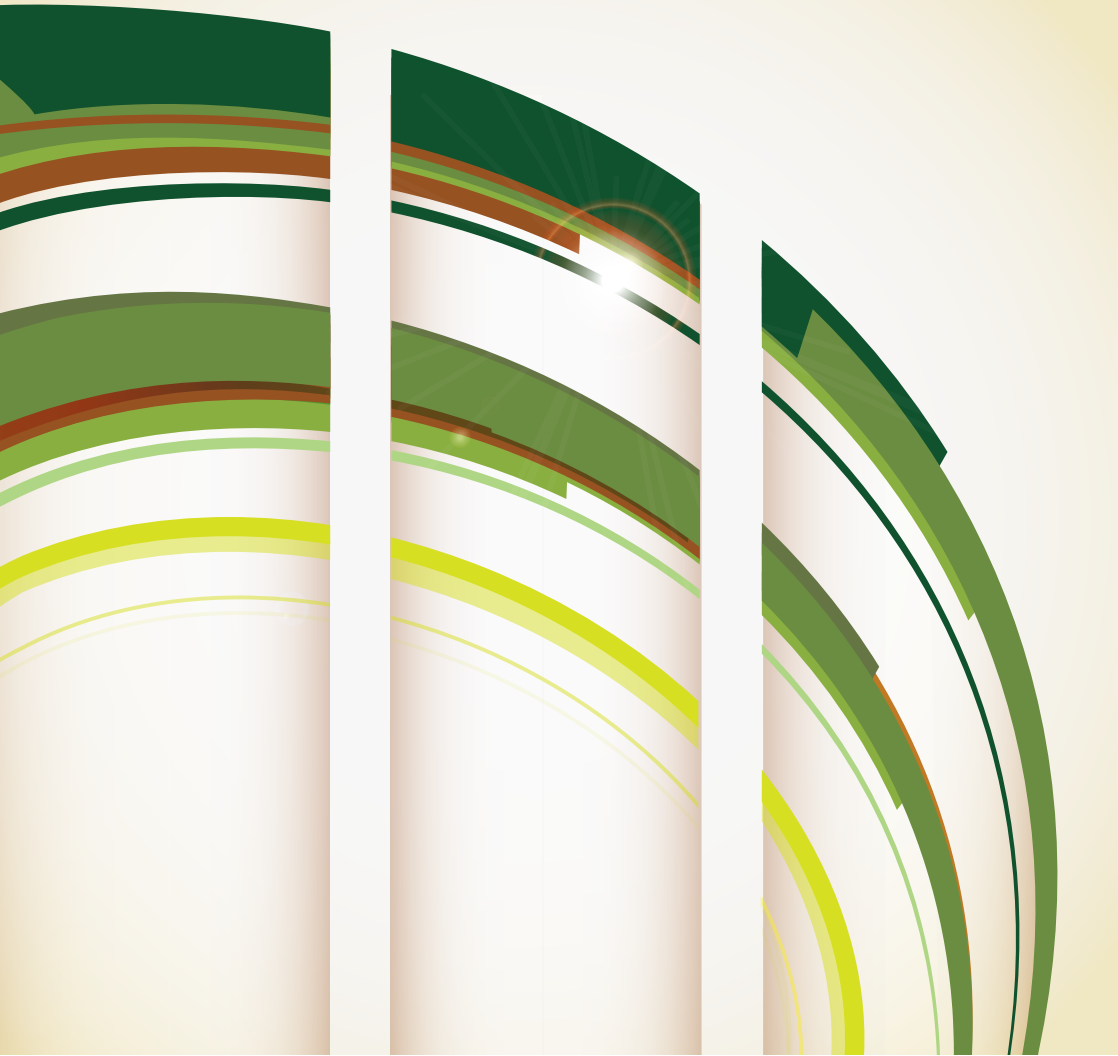
#### Northern Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (053) 838 1500

#### Western Cape Provincial Office

Telephone Number(s): (021) 441 8000





labour

---

Department:  
Labour  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA