

PRESS RELEASE

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Igniting Change – The need for Fire Safety Legislation in Malta

Earlier today, The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, through its Health and Wellness Committee which is sponsored by Atlas Insurance, organised an event to raise awareness on the need for a fire safety legislation in Malta.

Fire safety is an area of great concern for the general public, insurers and also for health and safety professionals. Malta currently follows a set of guidelines that are now out of date and which in themselves do not hold the power of law, while the new Fire Safety Act still awaits ratification.

In her introductory speech, Catherine Calleja, Council Member and Chair of the Health and Wellness Committee within The Malta Chamber, said “what The Malta Chamber is pushing for is to have a single piece of legislation which can be updated regularly to ensure that working or living in Malta is as safe as in other comparable jurisdictions. Fear of retrofitting is not a justifiable reason for delay. Transition periods to comply must be given but we have to start somewhere. The longer we delay the more expensive retrofitting will be. Resources for enforcement must be provided. It is useless having legislation in place and no provision for enforcement. Otherwise, it is just a matter of time before we are ‘too late’ to prevent another tragedy.”

“This standard is therefore about people’s safety and people’s lives. The drafting of the standard has to be the result of a solid interface between the Building & Construction Authority which is responsible for building codes together with the Civil Protection Department that has various important responsibilities in relation to this specific topic” said Hon Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi, Minister for Public Works and Planning.

When asked about who will take the role of enforcing the new legislation once it is in place, Ing Antoine Bartolo, Chief Officer at the Building and Construction Authority said that “the authority is looking at the resources required for the enforcement of this legislation.”

Peter Paul Coleiro, Director General at the Civil Protection Department, gave an overview on the current realities. “A holistic approach is the way forward. Together with the Building and Construction Authority, and the input from various stakeholders, we have drafted a fire legislation which is in its final stages. Emphasis is also being made on educating the young about fire safety and we have started discussions on getting courses for those who are interested in the profession,” he said.

During one of the panel discussions, Dr Marthese Portelli, CEO of The Malta Chamber, started off by saying that The Malta Chamber goes beyond simply representing its members, but ensures that its policy proposals are for the general benefit of the entire community. “As The Malta Chamber we are after clarity and responsibility. Rather than a lot of sporadic legislation falling within the remit of various entities, departments and enforcement officers we are pushing for a main law which regulates

fire safety and which gives the legislator enough flexibility to be able to legislate further and amend easily. The Malta Chamber is also advocating that everybody needs to bear their fair share of responsibility,” she noted.

Dr Portelli also highlighted how fire safety ties in to proper governance structures and policies, the relationship between energy efficient solutions and fire safety, as well as the relationship between quality and fire safety. In terms of public procurement, she insisted that one should move away from the ‘cheapest compliant’ as ‘cheap products mean cheap safety’.

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