



Press Release for immediate release

PLASTICS SA HOSTS GLOBAL FIRST: SELF-EMPLOYED MATERIAL RECYCLER TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR WASTE PICKERS

Johannesburg, 21 November 2024. Plastics SA has launched a pioneering Self-Employed Material Recycler Training Programme, marking a significant milestone in empowering South Africa's waste pickers. Last year, 50,000 South Africans found an informal form of income and employment as waste pickers, collecting used plastics for recycling. The programme, a first of its kind globally, equips informal waste reclaimers with the skills they need to safely and efficiently manage their recycling efforts while improving their business acumen.

The training, a NQF Level 1 qualification, awards 26 credits and runs over five days, spread across a three-week period. In this pilot initiative, 20 learners in Johannesburg and 25-learners in KwaZulu-Natal were selected and sponsored to attend the programme, which took place concurrently in both regions. The training was made possible through the financial support of [ExxonMobil](#), [Polyco](#), [Petco](#) and [Plastics SA](#) and is a ground-breaking programme that is expected to expand globally. The South African pilot is just the beginning, with 2,000 informal waste sector workers set to benefit through a "train the trainer" approach. Following a review of this pilot, plans are in place to expand the programme to other countries.

The launch event saw attendance from key industry collaborators, including Bala Nengwhela, Specialist: Waste Management at SALGA, Belinda Booker, Enterprise Development Handover Support at Petco, Andiswa Siyengo, Control Environmental Officer at DFFE, and Kirtida Bhana, Head of Plastics SA's Academy for Learning & Development.

Bhana emphasised the importance of tailored training for waste pickers: "This training covers a wide variety of topics that empower waste pickers to grow their businesses and ensure safer, healthier working conditions. The Self-Employed Material Recycler Training Programme focuses on several critical areas, including health and safety, waste handling, business management within the recycling economy, and strategies to maximise profits in a circular economy".

Rik Poppe, Senior Sustainability Advisor at ExxonMobil, highlighted the programme's significance: "ExxonMobil and the industry recognise the critical role of the informal sector. Plastic waste reclaimers often operate in rudimentary conditions, security challenges, and financial struggles. This training provides essential health and safety protocols, sorting techniques, and business skills. It is through a multi-stakeholder approach —encompassing waste reclaimers, government, academia, and industry that we can help create long-term change. This pilot programme will serve as a model for the rest of the world."

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