

A more ethical approach to waste disposal in the automotive repairer sector

By [Richard Green](#)

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The ethical disposal of noxious materials and substances, particularly in many commercial sectors, remains poorly regulated and difficult to enforce in South Africa. The automotive sector is one such sector that I believe needs attention.



Richard Green, national director of Samba | image supplied

All South Africans are aware of the critical value of our water resources and the South African Motor Body Repairers' Association (Samba) national executive has agreed that it is the responsibility of every industrial sector to contribute positively to the eradication of unethical disposal of substances and materials that could negatively impact our water resources. We can certainly start by getting our own backyard in order.

Samba, which represents over 900 accredited motor body repair businesses across South Africa, is advocating that, in tandem with the major automotive paint suppliers in the country and alongside government authorities, a working group is created to develop a programme to ensure that materials and substances used in the motor body repair production cycle are disposed of ethically.

In South Africa, the problem with hazardous waste is that it is simply being mixed with the general waste stream and is then disposed of on unsuitable general landfills that offer no special groundwater protection.

Pascale de Froberville, an associate in the environmental and sustainable development department at Eversheds Sutherland, says that there has been some positive movement toward the correct disposal of hazardous wastes in South Africa. Hazardous electronic wastes, for example, may not be disposed of in general waste landfills and must be redirected toward its reuse, recycling or disposal in landfills designed to accept hazardous waste.

“It would be encouraging to see the development of a sustainable, environmentally sound system for the responsible treatment and disposal of waste products in the automotive sector as well,” she says.

Water-based paints

Major motor manufacturers introduced the use of water-based paints via their OEM approval programmes in an attempt to curb the use of the traditional solvent-based auto paints that have been used for many years. These environmentally friendly water-based paints, although cost-effective when used properly are viewed as costly by many motor body repairers (MBR) and this has naturally resulted in the increased use of solvent-based paints again. Here disposal mechanisms are key and difficult to manage as a result of the volatile organic compounds the paints contain and their potentially hazardous impact on the environment.

While we understand that many motor body repairers’ are using solvent-based paints due to the increased financial pressures in the MBR sector, this trend makes it all the more important that Sambra takes the lead in ensuring the ethical disposal of these products.

Internationally, both on the African continent and in other countries such as Australia, associations and other sector authorities have launched, and continue to manage, successful disposal programs either financed by small additional sales taxes or hybrid models that derive income from the recovery of scrap materials in the process as well as a small sales tax. In these countries either the regulatory authorities enforce and/or endorse the processes.

We need to learn from these programmes and customise a solution that can work within our own environment.

Talks have already begun with three or four of the larger paint distributors and the response has been encouraging.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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