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M&D CONSTRUCTION GROUP SETS THE BENCHMARK IN PIPELINE QUALITY STANDARDS

M&D Construction Group, a civil engineering construction and building specialist, continues to take proactive steps to ensure that the highest quality standards are maintained when it builds critical infrastructure for its many public and private sector clients.

The company's Pipe Laying Division recently became the first South African contractor to have its workshop certified to ISO 3834 quality standards by the South African Institute of Welding (SAIW), the International Standards Organisation's authorised national body for company certification.

This state-of-the-art facility in Kya Sands, Gauteng, is the heart of the group's Pipe Laying Division, one of only a few contractors in this specialised field that has the internal skills and capacities to construct large steel pipelines of up to three metres in diameter.

These extensive capabilities have been deployed on a number of critical pipeline projects for fuel and gas producers, mining houses, water utility boards and municipalities, amongst others.

Rukesh Raghubir, the group's chief executive officer, says that this development is a pre-emptive response to the continuous drive for excellence by participants in specialist industrial sectors of the economy, as well as by various government bodies.

"It has significantly bolstered our already robust integrated systems to ensure

the highest possible standards are met, in terms of quality, in addition to health and safety, as well as the environment. It reaffirms our commitment to deliver a level of quality that matches our industrial clients' own quest for excellence. Meanwhile, this approach also greatly assists government in safeguarding against the construction of inferior infrastructure, which is becoming a growing concern in the public sector with the arrival of so many unscrupulous operators who threaten to bring the entire pipeline industry into disrepute."

Lance Cox, the group's safety, health environment, risk and quality manager, led the team that was tasked with ensuring that the workshop complies with the rigorous requirements of ISO 3834, a more specialised and onerous standard that, therefore, immediately confirms the high quality of fabrication undertaken at the workshop.

"It specifically guides the procedures of all operations involved in the fabrication of high-quality steel pipe componentry, including the many critical 'bends' that are used on a typical pipeline project," Lance says.

"For example, it prescribes processes and periods for the storage of consumables and the correct calibration of testing instrumentation. This is in addition to the procedures and timelines for the maintenance of welding equipment, confirming

the competency levels of our skilled welding team and the non-destructive testing processes we adopt on our sites."

Sound record-keeping is also a critical requirement for retaining accreditation, while all documentation has to be safely stored for no less than 12 years, as opposed to only three to five years as required by other more generic standards.

Moreover, it promotes a culture of accountability by establishing a single point of contact for all queries relating to the quality of welding undertaken by M&D Construction Group's Pipeline Division.

This formidable responsibility is being shouldered by Gerrie Le Grange, pipe quality manager.

Le Grange, together with Pieter Naudé, senior quality officer, and Gerhard Faber, engineering manager of the factory, also played a key role in ensuring that M&D Construction Group passed the SAIW's rigorous, extensive audit.

The process commenced early last year and Lance says that, during the preparation phases, he also received positive feedback from some of the Pipe Laying Division's clients regarding their interest in complying with the requirements of the ISO 3834 standard. One of these is a prominent participant in the oil and gas sector who demands that extremely high standards always be met and maintained by both industry participants and their supply chain partners.

Meanwhile, prominent public sector client bodies have become even more discerning when evaluating tenders for the construction of their water pipelines, many of which traverse vast distances in outlying rural areas, to efficiently deliver the 'life bringer' where and when it is required.

"I expect this trend to continue, considering the profound negative impact that the drought has already had on so many areas of the country. The situation has highlighted the need to maintain, upgrade and build new quality infrastructure, with some areas of the country already having been declared national emergencies," Lance says.

Info

Debbie Poggiolini

The Content Engine

+27 11 760 1020

debbie@thecontentengine.co.za