



**A SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF  
THE INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**1950-2001**

Compiled by Delia Bell from a review of meeting records at hand

September 2001

1950

At a Council meeting of the IFE, on 9 November 1950, Mr Botes, Chairman of the Interim Committee, passed a resolution which agreed to the reorganization of the South African branches. This led to the founding of the Transvaal Branch.

Mr G West of Durban North, Natal was appointed liaison officer. He was to assist with the restructuring of all the branches and to ensure a level of standardization throughout all the branches.

1951

An inaugural meeting of the Transvaal Branch was held on 8 August 1951 at the Central Fire Station, Johannesburg. A draft of the Articles of the Association were circulated which referred to Branch formation. The Articles also permitted members of all grades to have a say in the affairs of the Transvaal Branch.

1952

The first one-day conference of the Transvaal Branch was held on 23 April 1952, in Johannesburg. Mine Managers were invited. Five papers were read at the conference:

1. Fire Protection through the Model Building Regulation, by A M Mehl Esq
2. Application and Administration of Inflammable Liquids and Substances by-laws, by J W Neave Esq
3. IFE Transvaal, mainly topical by R Wolmarans Esq
4. Ambulance Service for Non-Europeans by S C Dagg Esq
5. First Aid Hydraulic Hose reels by H W Marburger Esq

On 16 February 1952 at a meeting held at the Krugersdorp Fire Station, much debate revolved around the use of the word Inflammable. A minute recorded the following "Preference: That to the word DANGER should be used with the word FLAMMABLE and NOT FLAMMABLE should be used for something which is NOT FLAMMABLE". A suggestion was made that schools and universities should be approached to alter the context of the word.

At the S.A.A.M.E. Building, Visagie Street, Pretoria on 22 October 1952 a meeting of the Council was held. The following item appeared on the Agenda, under GENERAL.

"In Bloemfontein a recent fatal mishap occurred due to the explosion of a soda acid extinguisher of the turn over type. The luckless employee of the firm concerned had taken the appliance outside for discharge, preparatory to recharging it, when the explosion was heard. He was found lying on the ground unconscious with his face badly battered. The victim did not apparently regain consciousness so that it was not possible to establish what precisely happened." On the Institution's recommendations,

Fire Departments were encouraged to, wherever possible, discourage the sale of inferior fire equipment.

1953

An Editorial committee was appointed to compile Year Book. The book was to include reports from the Second Annual General Meeting and Conference proceedings.

Forty-five pages were considered worthwhile. Advertisers were approached to purchase full or half pages and the Vereninging and Pretoria Fire Officers were asked to assist with this matter.

Printing costs: One hundred and thirty pounds of which one hundred and fifteen pounds was recoverable. The Annual Report was also printed in this edition at a cost of fifteen pounds. The President, Mr Brophy thanked all concerned.

1958

Twenty-eight candidates entered to write the 1959 exams - three Associate and twenty-five Graduate candidates. A decision was made at a Council Meeting held at the Central Fire Station, Johannesburg on 5 June 1958 that if candidates passed the exams successfully, the Diplomas would be handed out at the annual conference.

#### BILINGUALISM 1951-1960

Afrikaans members of the Transvaal branch complained of having to write exams in English. English and Afrikaans were the official languages of the Union. The Institution were asked to recognize the bilingual policy.

In 1952, the Institution's Translation representative, Mr. Papenfus, advised members that a Committee consisting of several municipal translators under the secretary ship of Mr Pieterse of the Translation Department, Pretoria Municipality, had certain technical terms translated into Afrikaans for submission to Stellenbosch University for approval and uniformity. Most of the information on fire matters were in the English language and with the assistance of a dictionary, which was the aim of the committee, the Afrikaans speaking student, would be greatly assisted in his studies. The project could take up to three years.

During 1959, 7 years later, a report was given at the 23rd quarterly meeting, held at the Central Fire Station, Johannesburg, on 23 November on the progress of the translations.

Terms had been extracted from the Manual of Firemanship, by the Municipal Translators Association. These translations had been forwarded to the Groot Woordeboek Komitee in Stellenbosch for approval of the translations.

At a meeting in 1960, the President, Mr Terre-Blanche explained the difficulty and financial implications that the translations were causing. The President stated that it was of his personal opinion that candidates could successfully write the exams in English. The matter was then left to resolve itself and the issue was no longer pursued by the Transvaal Branch of the IFE.

1959

The S A Fire Services Institute was formed. The Transvaal Branch was encouraged to support and assist with the development of such organizations.

1960

The ninth annual conference was held on the 11 May 1960 in Brakpan. The conference fee was set at five pounds fifty pence. The tenth annual conference was planned for 8th, 9th and 10th May 1961. This would be held in Pretoria.

1962

Mr F Davey, a member of the Transvaal Branch attended the IFE conference in the U K. It was agreed that he would be given fifty pounds to cover expenses. He visited a number of brigades in France, Portugal and the UK, and reported being amazed at the “wealth of manpower”, particularly in France. He spoke highly of the Fire Service in the UK.

1963

There was a great concern about the number of examination failures. A request was made to all Branches to investigate the matter.

1964

Mr F Davey proposed that an approach be made to the South East Africa and Western Province Branches for them to place before their respective Councils, the possibility of the establishment of a South African Council with particular reference to: Administration, Representation, Examination procedure and Conference procedure. It was agreed that from now on an attendance fee be charged.

1966

The President, Mr G van Schalkwyk, expressed his concern over the pass rate of exams. A Preliminary Certificate Examination was to be introduced. This was a positive attempt to assist in the preparation for the more difficult grades at Graduate and Associate levels. The following is recorded in the minutes “The demand for suitable qualified personnel not only in the Fire Service but in every field throughout the entire Republic was recently emphasized by Professor H J Bingle, Rector of the Potchefstroom University and I quote: “ The time will come when High School

pupils, who have the intelligence, will be compelled to pass Matric and may even be forced to attend university.”

1967

A Past President of the Institution, and Deputy Chief Officer of the Pretoria Fire Department, Mr. J J Pretorius had rather a unique experience in being the first ever Fire Officer from the Republic to set sail for the Antarctic. He was appointed by the Government to advise the personnel, stationed at the various bases, on matters of Fire Prevention and Protection.

1972 - 1980 (Information supplied by Mr. Ravenscroft)

At the time when Mr. Dennis Smith was an office bearer, it was agreed to transform the Transvaal Branch to the IFE (SA) which, after consultation with the IFE UK was duly accepted. Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban were then represented as at present.

The Transvaal branch, over the years, organized visits to the Chamber of Mines, Afrox, SABS, Underground Mines, Modderfontein Dynamite Factory and Atlas Aircrafts. These visits were arranged for members and particularly to assist students with their studies.

**POINTS OF INTEREST TAKEN FROM MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS FROM 1980 ONWARDS - THE MAJORITY OF THE EXTRACTS ARE TAKEN FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

1981

The major focus of the AGM of 1981 was the increase in the price of books from the UK, very disappointing exam results, an increase in subscriptions and exam fees.

1982

Mr. Sopper, in his inaugural address, emphasized that the Institution's task was to maintain and improve the good standards of Fire Engineering, Fire prevention and Fire extinction and to keep abreast with the continued growth and development in the industrial technological and scientific fields of the day.

Mr Greig was elected Secretary / Treasurer, taking over from Tiger Wright who was not available for a further term of office.

1983

A member, Mr. S Riordan was awarded the Ramsay Award for obtaining the highest marks in the world in the Member Exam. False IFE certificates were also in circulation and legal advice was sought.

1984

Major General du Plessis was the guest speaker at the AGM of 1983. He spoke on the military concern about loss control and fire protection and in this regard, mentioned it was important for the IFE and the Army to be closely involved.

He noted that the terrorist threat was making the role of Fire Departments more important in saving property and life.

The outgoing President, Mr. Sopper thanked Col. Jordaan and Mr. Craigie for their hard work in achieving recognition of the IFE corporate status with the S A Association of Registerable Technologists.

1985

The Government approached various Engineering Institutions with a detailed request that one Engineering Council be formed. Furthermore, organizations with common interests would be required to combine under one umbrella which would report to this Engineering council. With regard to the Fire Profession, this meant that SAFSI, IFE and FPA would have to have some form of combined representation in the near future.

1986

Col. Jordaan worked tirelessly for wider recognition of the IFE qualifications with the Board of Control for Technologists.

1987

IFE qualifications were now accepted for the purposes of registration with the Board of Control for Technologists.

1988

Mr. P Davey, President, gave an address on the Ozone controversy and the effect of halons on the environment. Worldwide concern initiated the Montreal Protocol with the object of controlling the use of CFC's and Halon. Halon should only be used where absolutely necessary for fire protection and was generally accepted that the use of halons would be unacceptable in the political sense by 1994.

Plans to hold the 1991 International Conference in SA was discussed. Every effort was made to ensure the support of overseas branches.

1989

Col Jordaan secured the SA bid to hold the IFE conference in SA.

Mr. Hennings and Mr. Riordan attended the International Fire Protection Engineers Institute Conference in USA and Canada. An informal presentation was given. A

discussion on the application of computer-aided fire modeling and the pitfalls awaiting novice users of these and the lack in education of fire engineers in SA ensued.

1991

Mr. Wouters, President, commented that that the value of the IFE qualifications was increasing, especially in view of the fact that these qualifications were given recognition towards registration with the Engineering Council of South Africa. It had also been borne out by the steady increase in new membership and exam applications over the past years. Fraudulent forging of examination documents was also an indication that IFE qualifications were being sought after!

1992

Members were reminded that the IFE's charter was to advance the science of fire engineering and to improve the protection of the community from the ravages of fire. Mr. Wouters felt that if the dangers exposed by the avid search for technical progress, was better organized and solved because of the IFE's involvement, then members could be proud of the role they played.

1993

The Council of 1993 spent much time on ensuring the recognition of IFE qualifications. In addition, the Council was trying to sort out the rating the Human Sciences Research Council had given to the IFE Preliminary Certificate and Member Diplomas. Once this matter had been finalized, the ratings would be sent to all municipalities for recognition of IFE qualifications, for salary grading purposes.

Firegold '93 was held in Durban, being the first International Fire Engineering Conference and Exhibition to be held in Southern African. The conference had been extensively promoted in Australia, Europe and the USA as jointly endorsed by the IFE, FPA and SA Fire Services Institute. Many local and international exhibitors and delegates attended, making the event a successful milestone in the history of international participation in South Africa.

1994

The President, Mr. Sparks spoke of the challenges facing the fire engineering profession in South Africa in 1994. He noted, in particular the issue of Reconstruction and Development.

He warned that changes in demographics of the community were likely to bring increased fire losses as the GNP rose - as figures released by the Fire Protection Association of the preceding years showed. IFE members would have work at keeping those losses to a minimum, with practitioners in the design and protection fields

having to contend with many new building developments, and being challenged in the areas of standards, population densities, building materials and means of escape.

1995

Mr. Sparks addressed members at the AGM in Johannesburg, now in the newly named province of Gauteng. The Engineering News had devoted an edition of the newspaper to fire engineering in SA. The front page featured an interview with the President and Secretary, which in his opinion highlighted recognition of the Institution's professionalism.

1996

Changes were made to the format of the IFE examinations. An Intermediate Exam was introduced to bridge the gap between the Preliminary and Graduate levels.

The President, Mr. Sparks, expected the next twelve months to be an exciting time for the fire services, with the emergence of the first truly Metropolitan Fire Services in SA occurring within the next year.

1997

The Branch Council of the IFE had embarked on expanding the IFE presence in the public fire services, by initiating an investigation into the licensing of special category practitioners by the Engineering Council. An IFE representative also served on the SABS Technical Committee which prepared an SABS Code of Practice for Automatic Sprinkler Installations for Fire-fighting purposes.

Internationally, the IFE was involved in the development of a Chair in Fire Law - litigation and legal understanding being essential prerequisites of all engineering activities, including fire engineering.

1998

The newly elected President, Mr. Greig, commented on the recent changes brought about by National Building Regulations and performance-based codes which indicated a strong need for fire engineering development. In response to the challenge, the IFE had established more examination subjects, and was making further progress with recognition of the discipline by Engineering Council.

1999

Mr. Greig updated the meeting on IFE's progress with particular attention to training accreditation, registration of competent persons, S A Qualification Authority registration and proposed amendments to the NBR's.

2000

Mr Greig was re-elected for a second term as Branch President. At the AGM, he expressed concern that the shortage of skilled, knowledgeable and ethical people would result in a decline in fire engineering and emergency service standards - as evidenced by fire loss statistics and media articles. Government was urged to take the initiative to reverse the trends.

