

## GENERAL SAFETY REGULATIONS IN THE OHS ACT EXPLAINED

### The Day That Changed Everything for Lerato

Lerato had been working in the packaging section of a busy warehouse for over a year. She knew her job like the back of her hand—operating machinery, moving heavy boxes, and keeping up with production deadlines. One Friday afternoon, she was rushing to finish a task when her hand got caught in an unguarded conveyor belt.

The pain was immediate, the injury serious, and Lerato was lucky she wasn't hurt worse. The investigation later revealed that the machine guard had been removed for maintenance but never replaced—a clear violation of safety procedures.

That incident opened Lerato's eyes to the importance of the **General Safety Regulations in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act)**. She realised that safety rules aren't just legal requirements—they're life-saving measures designed to protect workers like her.

## WHAT ARE GENERAL SAFETY REGULATIONS?

The General Safety Regulations (GSRs) are a set of rules under the South African OHS Act (Act 85 of 1993) that apply to all workplaces, regardless of industry. They are the foundation of workplace safety, setting out responsibilities for both employers and employees to create safe and healthy environments.

Think of the GSRs as a blueprint for safety:

- ✓ How to use equipment safely
- ✓ What employers must provide
- ✓ What workers must do
- ✓ How to prevent injuries



## KEY REGULATIONS EXPLAINED – THROUGH LERATO'S STORY

### 1. General Duties of Employers and Employees

After her injury, Lerato learned that her employer had a legal duty to provide a safe working environment. The law requires employers to:

Maintain machinery and equipment in safe working order

Provide proper training and supervision

Ensure safety measures like guards, signage, and emergency stops are in place

Workers, on the other hand, must:

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### Workers, on the other hand, must:

- Follow safety instructions
- Use equipment properly
- Report hazards immediately

Lerato realised she had a role too—speaking up when something doesn't feel right.



### 2. SAFE USE OF MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT

The conveyor belt that injured Lerato should have had its guard reinstalled after maintenance. The GSRs require that:

- Dangerous moving parts must be guarded
  - Guards must not be removed without proper procedures
  - Machines must have emergency stop buttons within reach
- Lerato's story shows that one missing guard can lead to disaster.

### 3. WORKING AT HEIGHTS AND LADDERS

In another section of the warehouse, Lerato's colleague, Siphso, almost fell from an unstable ladder while changing a lightbulb. The GSRs state:

- Ladders must be stable, well-maintained, and secured
  - Workers must not overreach or carry loads that affect balance
  - Fall protection must be in place for elevated work
- Lerato realised that simple checks could have prevented Siphso's near-miss.

### 4. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

After her accident, Lerato was issued gloves, safety shoes, and a reflective vest.

The GSRs require employers to:

- Provide suitable PPE at no cost
- Train workers on proper use and care
- Ensure PPE is in good condition
- But PPE is a last line of defence—the GSRs make it clear that hazards should first be eliminated or controlled before relying on PPE.



### 5. FIRST AID AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Lerato was grateful there was a trained first aider nearby when she was injured. The GSRs state that:



- Every workplace must have first aid kits and trained first aiders
- Emergency numbers and procedures must be clearly displayed
- Workers must be trained in emergency procedures, like fire drills

### WHY THE GENERAL SAFETY REGULATIONS MATTER

Lerato's story is a reminder that safety regulations aren't just rules—they save lives. Every requirement in the GSRs is there because someone, somewhere, got hurt before it was written into law.

The GSRs empower us to ask critical questions:

- ✓ Is this equipment safe to use?
- ✓ Are guards in place?
- ✓ Am I wearing the right PPE?
- ✓ Do I know the emergency procedures?

By following the GSRs, we create a workplace where safety is not a slogan—it's a way of life.

### FINAL THOUGHTS: SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Lerato now champions safety in her workplace, helping others understand that the General Safety Regulations protect us all. She reminds her team that safety is not just the manager's job, the safety officer's job, or the first aider's job—it's everyone's job.

So the next time you see a missing guard, a frayed cord, or a slippery floor, remember Lerato's story. Speak up, take action, and follow the GSRs—because your life, and the lives of your colleagues, depend on it.

