

An Outcry Against Unsafe Balustrades

by Rob Blackbeard



With a Bachelors' degree in Building Science and Construction Management, Rob places a very high premium on ethical conduct. As a Director of Steel Studio, he has built up the company to be a respected and well-known leader in the balustrade and staircase industry over the past 16 years. Rob honours the safety of Steel Studio's products that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also conform to strict industry standards. The company's track record in delivery time is above reproach. This fact says a lot for the management team's performance and skills instilled within the workplace and for the visionary leading this team.

Rob is also passionate about developing skills from the ground up. Under his guidance many employees have worked their way up through the ranks and currently hold successful management positions in the company. Rob and his management team has ensured that the company complies to the BBBEE Construction Sector codes in order to ensure positive economic transformation.

Accidents and deaths are happening around the world because of inferior balustrade systems. Ignorance around balustrade safety in the world is real. How many incidents and deaths do we need to hear about before we take it seriously and stop trying to save a buck on cheap balustrades at the cost of safety and human lives.



The South African National Standards clearly states that the owner of any building is liable should there be an accident or death related to the failure of a structural element of the building like the balustrade system. It is also the responsibility of the property owner to ensure that a Form 3 is received on completion of the installation of a balustrade system. A Form 3 is a declaration from the National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act, 1977 (Act No. 103 of 1977). This form ensures that a competent person is appointed to design a component or an element of a system, such as a balustrade.

Yet, no balustrade contractor is ever held liable for installing unsafe balustrades and the consumer ends up drawing the short straw. The list of incidents where unsafe balustrade systems cause serious accidents and even death, is long and what is more, absent from mainstream media reporting. It would appear that the culprits get off scot-free.

This tendency can be observed around the world but became very real to all South Africans with the recent tragedy when a young boy died when a sub-standard balustrade system failed in Mossel Bay. This specific balustrade design failed a 400 Joule soft body impact test, as well as all the other compulsory load bearing tests. And on another occasion, a grim reminder of the [2008 incident at uMhlanga mall](#).

This pattern of irresponsible behaviour is echoed world-wide with accounts from [Dubai](#), [Australia](#), [Sardinia](#) and [New York](#) to name a few.

A while ago as you might be aware, we launched a campaign [Saving Lives, One Balustrade at a Time](#). At Steel Studio, the safety of our balustrade systems is something that has always been very close to our hearts. As a responsible corporate citizen wanting to make a contribution to regulation in the industry, we have joined forces with other relevant associations in the South African building industry as well as with concerned balustrade contractors in South Africa. The Balustrade Association of South Africa was formed with some industry meetings already held.

Soon consumers will be able to verify the credentials and competence of balustrade contractors with the association, ensuring an industry that acts responsibly and supplies safe balustrade systems to protect the consumer.



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