

28 January 2005

## ILO/USDOL HIV/AIDS WORKPLACE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

1. The development of our policy was initiated by the Society's management.
2. Management involved the staff in the following manner:
  - The entire workforce was asked to submit key things/points which should be included in the HIV/AIDS Policy. The response from staff was very good.
  - The staff was also asked to select employees who could be trained as peer educators in their respective work stations. This was done without any problems.
  - Flax/Family Life Association was asked to train the educators.
  - After training the HIV/Aids educators became very active in dissemination of information and the development of the policy.
  - A draft policy was produced and sent to the Industry Union and peer educators for further contributions.
  - Then it was adopted.
  - Company is Swaziland Building Society. It's a financial institution.
  - Total number of workforce 103.
  - ILO Principle – Non discrimination of HIV/Aids employees.
  - Respect of rights such as confidentiality.
  - Right to information on the subject of HIV/Aids.

# **SWAZILAND BUILDING SOCIETY'S POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR CHRONIC AND LIFE THREATENING DISEASES**

## **1. PREAMBLE**

Swaziland Building Society is greatly concerned with the well being of its workforce especially in regard to chronic or life threatening diseases, such as Cancer, Heart Diseases, Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B, amongst others.

For this reason the Society has found it pertinent to formulate an HIV/AIDS and other chronic/life threatening diseases policy.

In respect to HIV/AIDS the Society is faced with an epidemic of serious magnitude and severity. This is presenting the Society with unique and complex problems, which have to be managed appropriately and effectively. Therefore, both management and employees need to develop proactive strategies and policies to address the problems that are already being experienced within the industry.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide clarity on the Society's views and commitment with regard to employees who may contract chronic/life-threatening diseases.

- Prevent and control the spread of all life threatening diseases.
- Maintain confidentiality and avoid harmful publicity.
- Inform employees of their rights and benefits.
- Provide an education framework with regard to all life threatening diseases.
- Create a supportive environment for employees with HIV/AIDS and other chronic/life threatening diseases.
- Provide a consistent set of guidelines for managing employees and their registered dependants with life threatening diseases.
- Ensure that those employees who have contracted HIV/AIDS are not discriminated against.

## **2. PHILOSOPHY**

The Society believes that a responsible approach to chronic/life threatening diseases involves maintaining the interests of the company, its employees and their immediate families. The protection of the Society's employees its benefit funds and the community at large is a primary objective. The Society will strive to achieve a balance between the compelling needs of the infected and sick employees and the legitimate needs of the organization. Whilst the company aims to support the physical and emotional well being of employees this should not cause a disruption of productivity or impact negatively on employee morale.

The Society believes that an essential element in fighting disease is knowledge on which medical self-management can be based. It is an underlying principle that ignorance of a serious medical condition is a dangerous approach and ignoring symptoms precludes early and accurate diagnosis and therefore prompt, appropriate and vital health-care.

### **3. SCOPE**

The policy applies to all employees of the Swaziland Building Society.

### **4. PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES**

The Society commits itself to the following provisions so as to ensure that the implications of life threatening diseases are effectively addressed at the work place:

#### **4.1 EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

The Society endorses the principle that education and awareness of employees as regards HIV/AIDS is the most effective way of reducing infection as well as managing HIV/AIDS at the work place. The HIV/AIDS programme will form part of an ongoing process with the following objective:

- Provide facilities, personnel and other resources to ensure the widest possible dissemination of information on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other life threatening diseases.
- The HIV/AIDS education programme will form an integral part of the company's concern for the well being of the employees and their families.
- Education will be carried out through Peer Educators and relevant NGO's and attendance to such sessions shall be compulsory to all designated personnel.
- The HIV/AIDS programme will be included as part of an ongoing health education and induction training program.

#### **4.2 COUNSELLING**

- The Society undertakes to provide counseling through the relevant NGO's to all employees and their immediate families. Those employees who have contracted HIV/AIDS and other chronic life threatening diseases shall also be provided with professional counseling as far as this is consistent with the terms of this policy.
- Colleagues and where possible caretakers of infected employees may also be provided with counseling or referred to Community Agencies.

**5. INFECTED EMPLOYEES**

The Society acknowledges that continued employment for an employee with a life threatening disease may sometimes be therapeutically important in the remission or recovery process or may help prolong that employee's life.

Employees who are aware that they have a life threatening disease need only inform the Society once they are unable to perform their normal task, or if they are recommended to do so by a counselor or Medical Practitioner. As long as these employees are able to meet acceptable standards of work performance and work attendance and given that the medical officer is satisfied that their condition is not a threat to others, treatment of these employees must be sensitive and consistent with the treatment of other employees.

At the same time the Society has an obligation to provide a safe working environment for all employees and customers thus precaution must be taken to ensure that an employee's condition does not present a health and/or safety threat to other employees or customers.

Accepting that employees with life threatening diseases do not pose a threat to colleagues, it is expected that colleagues will work in the usual way.

An employee who discriminates shall be informed that his/her conduct is unacceptable and may lead to disciplinary action.

**6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All medical information regarding employees with chronic/life threatening diseases will be kept confidential, except where required by law to be disclosed to specific people or with the consent of the employee.

Should any person within the Society disclose such confidential medical information without legal authority or relevant consent from the employee, appropriate disciplinary action will be instituted.

**7. SICK LEAVE AND RETIREMENT**

Once an employee's work performance and attendance become affected, the opinion of the Medical Practitioner could be sought. Such an employee will be entitled to exhaust his sick leave and shall be allowed to take early retirement on medical grounds.

**8. RECRUITMENT**

The Society will not discriminate against an employee or an applicant for employment during the recruitment and selection process, as long as the person is capable of performing the required job.

**9. HIV TESTING**

The Society shall not conduct pre-employment HIV testing for any category of recruit. Testing for HIV will only be undertaken with the informed and explicit consent of the employee and with the objective being to assist the employee to obtain the appropriate support and care.

An employee may, on his/her own volition request the Medical Practitioner that he be tested for HIV. Results of the test if undertaken shall be treated with the confidentiality deserved therein.

**10. MEDICAL ASSISTANCE**

An employee who contracts a life threatening disease and becomes ill shall be entitled to the full benefits as provided in the rules of SWAZIMED.



In the event that the employee exhausts his/her entitlement the Society may provide a loan facility to cater for further medical expenses. Such a loan shall be subject to the 35% requirement rule.

**11. CONDOMS**

As part of its AIDS preventative programme, the Society shall make condoms readily available.