

Agrément South Africa officially launched as a Public Works entity

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Public Works Minister **Thulas Nxesi** on Friday launched technical agency [Agrément South Africa](#) as a fully-fledged legal entity of the Department of Public Works (DPW).

The entity was previously managed by the [Council for Scientific and Industrial Research](#) (CSIR).

Agrément is tasked with conducting [testing](#), performance and certification of [construction](#) industry [products](#) and methodologies to ensure quality and durability of such [products](#) on behalf of the DPW.

Agrément CEO **Joe Odhiambo** said one of the first focal points for the entity will be to eradicate pit toilets and contribute towards the creation of [safer toilet infrastructure](#) for disadvantaged communities and, thereby, reduce possible injuries or fatalities.

The entity is also tasked with managing the South African Eco-Labeling [System](#) as government's recognised [system](#) for [building](#) materials and [products](#), which will be incorporated in the DPW's standard specifications for [construction](#) works from next year.

This [environmental](#) assessment will entail inspecting [green building](#) aspects including indoor air quality, comfort, [environmental](#) issues, and material and [energy](#) resource conservation.

Odhiambo said this will be especially effective to, for example, prohibit poisonous adhesives being used for carpets, which have been proven to make people sick over time, owing to the [chemicals](#) it consists of.

Further, during Nxesi's keynote address, he stipulated that the work may seem similar to what the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) does, but the bureau deals with subjects that have, or can be, standardised – typically [products](#) have been in use for a long enough time to be regarded as conventional by manufacturers and contractors.

Agrément comes onto the scene when a new [product](#) or process is developed outside the existing scope of the SABS – and provides the necessary [testing](#) and certification to provide assurances that the [product](#) is fit-for-purpose.

Nxesi noted that, in the 2016/17 [financial](#) year, [Agrément South Africa](#) received 35 applications for certifications. Of those, 29 were awarded certificates. "Agrément will continue to undertake its mandate of carrying out the highly rigorous technical assessments of [non-standardised construction-related products](#) and [building systems](#)."

[Agrément South Africa](#)'s certificates are comprehensive advisory documents, intended to assist [building](#) authorities and other interested parties to decide, on technical grounds, whether a particular [innovation](#) will be suitable for a specified purpose in a given situation.

The certificate contains an objective assessment of the performance-in-use of the subject to allow designers and specifiers to acquaint themselves with its likely performance.

There is a detailed technical description, which enables [building](#) inspectors and other interested parties to check the manufacture, [installation](#) or erection of the [product](#) or [system](#).

Nxesi warned that he will be watching State-owned entities (SOEs) carefully in terms of governance, since these certifications' impact also depends on the integrity of these entities, since they are often involved with [construction projects](#) and governance thereof.

"I am watching carefully all the SOEs in terms of governance. A number of [them] have shown poor governance. We will be harsh on those issues of governance. Some SOEs have been reckless; [taking] huge salaries for themselves and we will be watching."

Meanwhile, Nxesi concluded that the technologies to be promoted by Agrément as new innovative technologies should rather draw on [appropriate technology](#) than '[disruptive technology](#)'.

For example, "using [resources](#) that we have locally and using local talent to create [appropriate technology](#)" that would meet local requirements and needs. 🇳🇮