

# Selcrete offers a cheaper, safer option

SOUTH Africa's housing shortage may be solved faster, more cheaply, and more environmentally friendly, says Graeme Horwood, chief executive of Selcrete.

By mixing cement with polystyrene, and an additive – a technique that is widely used in northern Europe – Selcrete wants to do just that. The company's pilot project, phase one of a revamped day care in the township of Khayelitsha, opened its doors last week.

One of the problems at Noluthando day care centre, which cares for over 265 children aged two months to six years, is that its timber structures don't offer adequate protection against the summer heat, cold winters, and fires.

"For phase one, we helped build a small utility hall, an administration block, and a starter kindergarten classroom using our product. The blocks are made of cement, expanded polystyrene beads, water, and a binding agent," says Horwood.

"Selcrete provides two to three times the insulation levels of structures made of



**The new buildings at Noluthando day care centre in Khayelitsha were built using Selcrete blocks.**

bricks and mortar. It offers better protection against fires and fungus too," he says.

Noluthando might be the first, but Horwood says it certainly won't be the last Selcrete project.

"We are negotiating a number of commercial and residential projects. In Knysna, we are building a house, and we are working on a social responsibility re-build in Khayaletu, a

township near Knysna on behalf of Rotary for the Knysna Educational Trust," says Horwood.

What makes Selcrete interesting for the local market is that projects can be built in less than half the time of conventional homes. This could translate to a 25 percent cost reduction.

"13.1 percent of South Africans live in informal settle-

ments. We can deliver better quality homes, and other buildings too, more efficiently and cost-competitively while being better for the environment," says Horwood.

He says Selcrete is a greener building product compared to many others, due to the use of recycled polystyrene.

"Because our blocks are made on site, they don't have to be transported which saves energy and minimises carbon emissions too. Better insulation means that Selcrete buildings require less energy for heating and cooling."

Mavis Mbaba, who founded Noluthando 22 years ago when she opened her home to 45 children who needed to be cared for while their parents were at work, is delighted at the improvements to her day care centre.

She says: "From now on, the children can do activities in a safe environment, without the risk of fires. These new buildings don't require as much maintenance as the wooden ones. Maintenance costs a lot of money. I am very very happy."