THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCREDITATION FOR ROAD RESTRAINT SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

SARTSMA
South African Road Traffic Safety Management Association

The Trade Association for companies manufacturing and supplying road traffic safety devices & related products within South Africa
www.sartsma.co.za

Road safety remains one of the most pressing challenges in South Africa, with thousands of accidents occurring annually on national, provincial, and municipal roads. One of the key measures to reduce the severity of road crashes is the correct use of road restraint systems – such as guardrails, wire rope safety barriers, and crash cushions – which are designed to contain and redirect errant vehicles, protecting both motorists and pedestrians.

However, the effectiveness of these systems is only guaranteed if they meet strict accreditation requirements, as outlined by the Committee of Transport Officials (COTO) Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Works for South African Road Authorities. Accreditation is not merely a formality; it is a critical assurance that products installed on public roads are tested, reliable, and compliant with international safety standards.

Why Accreditation Matters

- **Public Safety**

  Road restraint systems are life-saving devices. Accredited systems have been tested under controlled conditions to ensure they perform as intended during high-impact collisions. Using unaccredited products places road users at unnecessary risk.

- **Compliance with Standards**

  COTO, through its Standards for Road Restraint Systems, mandates that all products used in South Africa must meet specified performance levels. Accreditation ensures compliance with both local and internationally recognised standards (such as EN 1317), creating consistency and reliability across road networks.

- **Accountability and Quality Control**

  Accredited products provide accountability. Manufacturers and installers must adhere to rigorous testing, certification, and quality assurance processes, ensuring that road authorities receive safe and durable systems.

- **Sustainability and Cost-Effectiveness**

  While accredited systems may involve a higher initial investment, they are more cost-effective in the long run. Non-compliant or substandard products are prone to failure, leading to higher replacement costs, increased liability, and preventable loss of life.

- **Legal and Ethical Responsibility**

  Road authorities, engineers, and contractors have a legal and ethical duty to prioritise public safety. The use of non-accredited systems could expose stakeholders to legal challenges in the event of system failure, especially if lives are lost due to negligence.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- COTO Chapter 1 (General)
- COTO Chapter 11 (Ancillary Roadworks)
- COTO Chapter 13 (Structures)
- **TMH 24 received approval from COTO in July 2025 and is formally acknowledged as a compulsory draft standard.**

Building Safer Roads Together

The accreditation requirement from COTO is not a barrier but a safeguard for all South Africans. It ensures that every barrier, guardrail, or crash cushion installed on the road contributes meaningfully to reducing fatalities and injuries.

As road safety is a shared responsibility, it is essential for:

- Government departments to enforce compliance,
- Contractors and suppliers to source accredited systems only, and
- Industry associations to raise awareness and educate stakeholders.

By prioritising accredited road restraint systems, South Africa moves closer to achieving safer roads, fewer fatalities, and a more responsible road infrastructure network.