

Vehicles modified for disabled

IT is time for holiday, travelling and relaxing. This means it's December. It is one of the reasons a lot of people with disabilities have recently been making enquiries about the importing of modified vehicles.

I asked Mr Johan Viljoen, the national director of the National Council for People with Physical Disabilities in South Africa (NCPDPSA), about the issues surrounding this topic. I wanted to know more about the latest developments.

It is interesting to note that a deduction in income tax on modified, imported as well as locally produced vehicles, is available. However, this deduction is not applicable for all persons with disabilities. It is important to note that the vehicle must be modified in such a way that it allows the disabled person to drive it. "A strict screening process assures that this comfort only extends to people who really need it," said Viljoen.

To be eligible for this benefit, a possible buyer must apply for a valid permit. The prescribed application forms are available from the NCPDPSA. The contact number is 011-726-8040 or nationaloffice@ncppdsa.org.za.

"The Council and its provincial structures work together closely to ensure that the community of disabled people gets access to this comfort." The application and motivation is presented on a provincial level to a panel of experts. A recommendation is only made if the panel is convinced that the vehicle in question is the only one that can fulfill the needs of the applicant. The application is then presented to the National Council, who refers it to the Department of Trade and Industry which has to give the final approval. "The final decision therefore lies with the Department of Trade and Industry.

The department releases the permit directly to the applicant – without prolonging the process unnecessarily. According to Viljoen, the application is divided into four categories. Two of these are relevant for the drivers of the vehicle and the other two for people who will be driven around by someone else. Vehicles must have the following requirements:

- . It must be a right-hand drive automatic.
- . It must comply with the safety requirements set out by the SABS. This certificate can be obtained from the dealer or the SABS.
- . The vehicle will be locally modified so that it still meets the requirements of the Department of Trade and Industry.

After the applicant receives the permit, he/she can go to the dealer where the vehicle was ordered. The dealer and the client can then discuss the deduction that will be granted. Regulations make provision for deduction to the value of around 29% of the value of the vehicle when it arrives in South Africa – not 29% of the retailing price. According to experts, the eventual deduction should be 17% of the retailing price. This may differ from vehicle producer to vehicle producer. The vehicle must then be inspected by customs and the inland duty office to ensure that all modifications meet their requirements. The purpose of the deduction contributes to the independence and integration of people with disabilities. If more people living with disabilities are able to move independently, more top jobs in South Africa will be filled with disabled people.

What is your opinion? Write to me at P.O. Box 1758, Worcester 6849 or e-mail me at fanie.dt@mweb.co.za.