

# Adopt a panel shop

**T**he 'Adopt a Panel Shop' enterprise development initiative, launched as a pilot project in Soweto in 2005 by Alexander Forbes and Guardrisk, is being rolled out to more black panel beaters countrywide.

In terms of the project, black-owned panel beaters seeking to improve their operations will be given access to finance.

It is estimated that a full-service repair shop could cost entrepreneurs in the region of R10 million to establish.

Errol Masinga, the enterprise development co-ordinator at Alexander Forbes Risk Services, revealed that a Pretoria based company has already received a grant of almost R1 million to acquire and install new equipment and renovate its premises.

Masinga says two additional panel shops in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape have been

identified for upgrading. The initiative is expected to expand into the Western Cape.

"We're busy checking on the kind of support we can offer the panel shops we have identified to achieve one of the three recognised grades required to receive business from the insurance industry," he says.

He stressed that access to the lucrative insurance industry repair market required marginalised panel beaters to receive the same formal grading as that of current operators, but this was a bigger challenge than merely providing equipment and facilities.

Panel shops with one of the three gradings will also need intensive skills development and management, as well as systems upgrades, he says. As a result, an empowerment model that combines financial transfers with skills and capacity development will have to be developed.