

SAPPI DELEGATION VISITS FABI

A group of 15 Sappi staff members from the Mpumalanga region, under the guidance of Duncan Ballantyne, Fire Risk Manager for Sappi at Ngodwana, visited FABI. This is the third year that Mr Ballantyne has organised such a visit. The purpose of the visit was to expose Sappi staff to the research on pests and diseases in the forestry industry conducted by the Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP) in FABI.



Prof. Wilhelm de Beer gave the group an overview of the research done by the TPCP, and Sappi's support to the programme over 27 years. Dr Brett Hurley, with the help of staff members, guided the group through the FABI Biocontrol Centre at the University of Pretoria Experimental Farm, showing them what the most important forest pests look like and explaining some details about the biocontrol agents that are produced and developed by the TPCP to counteract the pests.

On the main campus, extension officer of the TPCP programme Izette Greyling explained to how the programme in FABI was linked to day-to-day forestry practices in the field, with the

ultimate aim of combatting fungal and insect pests and reducing their impact. Members of the TPCP are virtually in the field every day of the year, diagnosing problems, advising foresters, and monitoring the spread of pests and diseases and the impact of the biocontrol agents.



Darryl Herron, manager of the TPCP diagnostic clinic, explained to the guests how diseased plant material sent to FABI for diagnosis, was treated upon arrival. These included basic practices like fungal isolation, PCR, DNA sequencing, and inoculation studies that are all employed to ensure accurate and responsible diagnoses that inform sound advice to the people in the field.

Feedback from the group was extremely positive and they had many questions. The visit again underscores how important information sharing between researchers in the laboratory and the end consumers in the field is.