



STATEMENT ON THE RELEASE OF THE 2019 MINE HEALTH AND SAFETY STATISTICS

24 January 2020

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of today's briefing is to officially release the 2019 occupational health and safety statistics for the mining industry. Together with our social partners in the mining industry – organised business and organised labour – we have assessed progress made on health and safety, and what is still to be done to achieve the goal of a fatality-free mining industry.

The health and safety of employees is central to the long-term sustainability of mining. Hence it remains a key priority.

This week we remember the Coalbrook Disaster. Sixty years ago on the 21st January 1960, four hundred and thirty five (435) mineworkers lost their lives in Coalbrook. Since then, we have made significant strides. We have learnt many lessons that have enhanced our approach to health and safety in mining.

We are encouraged that our efforts continue to show a sustainable downward trend in occupational diseases, injuries and fatalities.

Mining in South Africa offers excellent economic opportunities. It must always be done in a responsible manner. Every mine employer must provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of employees and all those that may be directly affected by the activities of mining. There should be a strong focus on the environment and on the interests of all stakeholders.

OCCUPATIONAL FATALITIES

The sector recorded fifty one (51) fatalities in 2019. This is the lowest ever number of fatalities on record. This represents a 37% improvement, year-on-year, compared to 2018 when we had eighty one (81) fatalities.

This record is a result of concerted effort by all involved. The health and safety campaigns throughout the year have demonstrated that significant improvements in results can be achieved.

We, therefore, commend the collective efforts which have gotten us here.

We must redouble our efforts because we are dealing with people; who are valuable members of their families and communities.

The fatalities per commodity in 2019 were as follows:

- 19 in the gold sector, compared to 40 in 2018 - a year-on-year improvement of 53%;
- 19 in platinum, compared to 12 in 2018 - a year-on-year regression of 58%;
- 7 fatalities in the coal sector, compared to 9 in 2018, a year-on-year improvement of 22%;
- Other mines recorded 6, compared to 20 in 2018, a year-on-year improvement of 70%. The category of other mines include diamonds, chrome, copper, zinc, sand, lime, granite, manganese, nickel and bricks.

The regression in the safety performance of the platinum sector is a concern. Specific attention will be paid to this area in the current year.

We continue to support efforts to ensure that we reach finality on Lily mine. The department is working with all parties to ensure the business rescue process is concluded successfully. This will lead to the reopening of the mine and the resumption of efforts to retrieve the container.

OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES

A total of 2 406 injuries were reported in 2019, compared to 2 447 reported during 2018, translating to a 2% decrease year-on-year. The breakdown is available in your packs. Most of these injuries are mainly as a result of repeat accidents categorised as fall of ground, transportation and mining and general types of accidents.

MEDICAL DEATHS DUE TO OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES

The number of Annual Medical Reports (AMRs) submitted to the Department increased slightly by 2.46% from a total of 975 reports in 2017; to 999 reports in 2018.

On medical deaths, an increase has been noted on fatalities reported due to occupational diseases when compared to the previous year. A total of 25 more cases were reported by gold mines from 17 cases to 42; while platinum mines showed a decrease from seven (7) cases to three (3) cases. Two (2) cases were reported by coal mines when compared to one (1) case in 2017.

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES

A noticeable decrease of 22.86% was noted on the total number of occupational diseases reported; declining from 4 483 in 2017 to 3 458 in 2018. The silicosis cases decreased by 28.68% from 652 cases in 2017; to 465 cases in 2018. The pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) cases decreased by 23.63% from 2 247 cases in 2017; to 1 716 in 2018. The noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) cases decreased by 22.34% from 1 141 cases in 2017; to 886 cases in 2018.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENT MEASURES

Our collective efforts have so far proven that stakeholder collaboration is critical.

The Department and the Mine Health and Safety Council will host a Mine Health and Safety Summit later this year; where we will report on the implementation of milestones to improve occupational health and safety performance in the industry.

To address seismic and gravity-induced fall-of-ground accidents, the Department works close with the established “FOG Task Team”, which comprise of the MHSC, the Council for Geoscience, Minerals Council South Africa, National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), Solidarity, UASA and the South African Institute of Rock Engineers.

POWER SUPPLY INTERRUPTIONS

The Department urges mines to remain vigilant and take the necessary precautionary measures in the case of power interruptions. In instances where the interruption of electrical supply to any equipment could result in a significant risk, mines must ensure that such electrical supply can be provided from another source or network, which can include an emergency supply alternator or generator.

MONITORING AND ENFORCING COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW

The implementation of the enforcement measures contained in the Mine Health and Safety Act No.29 of 1996 is a priority. We cannot afford to become complacent because of the improvements we have made thus far.

We will continue to engage with executive management to devise strategies to reduce fatalities, injuries and occupational diseases.

In 2019, we issued two directives. The first was to eliminate accidents related to shafts and winders. The second was for emergency preparedness (second outlets). On the 28th February 2019, as a result of winder technical problems at the shaft, a total of 944 underground employees could not be brought to surface after their shift. Fortunately, they were successfully rescued from the second outlet in the neighbouring shaft. Employers and mineworkers are urged to fully comply with these directives to avoid potential disaster and to sustain the improvements we are making.

We have also vigorously monitored compliance with the 2018 directives to eliminate fire, heat and oxygen deficiency related accidents, especially when persons gain access into abandoned or old mined-out areas underground; at a mine.

Furthermore, we continue to monitor compliance with the directive to eliminate rock-burst and rock-fall related accidents, specifically when pillar extraction or removal are performed at a mine.

The Department is encouraged that this approach, through focused inspections and audits, has minimised related cases and saved lives of several mineworkers during the 2019 calendar year.

Again, through inspections, TB, HIV and AIDS programmes will be evaluated to ensure improvement on health matters affecting mineworkers.

We will continue to support initiatives by law enforcement agencies to curb illegal mining, which -among others – impacts negatively on the health and safety of surrounding communities, and illegal miners themselves.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, it is critical that mine employers, mineworkers and the department are extra vigilant at the start of the year. Historical data on mine accidents has revealed that most occupational fatalities reported occur during the first quarter of the calendar year. The increase in fatalities and injuries during this period is mainly attributed to production pressures associated with performance incentives, poor supervision and complacency.

All employers and employees are encouraged to work safely and apply zero tolerance on sub-standard work and conditions. Shift fatigue management systems must be implemented and be continuously monitored. In cases where arrangements are made for workers to work overtime, managers must ensure that proper supervision is carried out by all responsible mine personnel and measures are implemented to prevent accidents. Health and safety campaigns, visible felt leadership, zero tolerance to unsafe behaviour and extra vigilance by all workers are exceptionally vital.

Inspectors from the Department will also intensify the monitoring and enforcement of the law through inspections and audits. All mineworkers and supervisors are reminded that unsafe work practices always lead to undesirable circumstances.

There is also a need to ensure that mineworkers have the knowledge, skills and support to exercise their rights to withdraw or refuse to work under dangerous conditions. Mineworkers are also urged not to risk their lives because of production bonuses.

We need to collectively adopt the fundamental stance that if mines cannot mine safely then they should not mine at all, until the necessary measures have been put in place to protect the lives of all mineworkers.

Zero Harm is our ultimate goal. We must ensure that each mineworker returns home unharmed. Let us build on the progress we have made.

I thank you.