

Trends Article

A-OSH EXPO leads the way in mining safety considerations

JOHANNESBURG – November 2017 - ‘Safety first!’ should always be an imperative in the mining industry, and it has come under the spotlight both locally and globally in the recent past. In November 2017, the South African Chamber of Mines expressed concern over the rising number of fatalities in the country’s mines, after recent accidents had brought the number of fatalities to date to 76, overtaking the 73 deaths reported for the same period in 2016. At the beginning of 2017, consulting firm Deloitte released a global report on the mining industry, *Tracking the trends 2017*, in which it relayed that the issue of health and wellness was rising on miners’ agendas globally.

Commenting on the increased numbers of South African fatalities for 2017 as compared to 2016, the Chamber of Mines noted that this grim fact was particularly disappointing ‘given the consistent improvement the industry has seen over the past two decades’. The Chamber highlighted the progress that had been made over the previous 25 years, pointing out that between 1993 and 2016, the number of fatalities had declined by around 88 percent.

In its 2017 report on the top ten mining trends for the year, Deloitte highlighted health and safety issues, noting that; “To ensure sustainable productivity improvements, companies must also foster healthy workforces...”

Interestingly, the report included a strong focus on mental health, pointing out that, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), employees worldwide will be absent for 12 billion working days each year due to depression and anxiety alone. The report said, “Unfortunately, the mining industry in this area has not been stellar.... The Legislative Assembly of Western Australia issued a report examining mental health issues among fly-in/fly-out (FIFO)¹ workers. It found that the incident rate for mental illness is 30 percent among FIFO workers, compared to a 20 percent national average....

“Given the sector’s performance challenges and the unrelenting focus on shoring up operating models, many managers are under greater pressure than before. Jobs are no longer secure, there is an imbalance between effort expended and reward received, and job control is declining. As a result, the industry is seeing a rising tide of depression...”

While the Australian mining industry obviously exhibits operational differences to the South African sector, certain overlaps can be instantly seen, including the references to job security and declining job control. The local mining industry should arguably also show a focus on mental health, and depression in particular, in addition to issues around physical safety.

From a physical safety perspective, South Africa is well-known as having many of the world’s deepest mines. In the wake of the recent statistics on South Africa’s

¹ A method of employing people in remote areas by flying them temporarily to the work site instead of relocating employees and their families permanently.

2017 mine fatalities, the Chamber of Mines reported that, to minimise the possibility of fall-of-ground incidents², the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) has injected more than R150 million into fall-of-ground research. The Chamber added that “AngloGold Ashanti South Africa head Chris Sheppard, sponsor of the Mining Industry Occupational Safety and Health fall-of-ground team, will lead a task team to develop a summary of rockburst leading practices and propose the best ways to share these efforts with all those who are involved in deep level mining.”

In addition to the implementation of locally endorsed occupational health and safety practices such as the aforementioned task team, the local mining industry can, and should, also learn from international best practice. The Deloitte report mentions, as another of its top ten trends, the digital revolution in the mining industry, noting: “While the biggest impact (of digital) has been in consumer-facing industries, there are growing examples of digital transformation in asset-intensive industries such as advanced manufacturing and natural resources....

“...Drones will be used for data collection, inspection, stock control, condition and safety monitoring.... Wearables will be used for field maintenance and real-time machine inspection instructions, improving operator-based care and safety...”

The report further outlines plans for Barrick Gold, which, in partnership with technology multinational Cisco, plans to digitally reinvent its business from its

² Fall of ground: accidents that relate to unexpected movement of rock mass and the uncontrolled release of debris and rock, as a result of gravity and/or pressure, strain burst or rock burst

mines to its head office. As part of this digitisation, and to “...improve safety, productivity and its environmental performance, the company will automate its equipment, use predictive algorithms to gain greater metallurgic precision, and use digital technology to streamline its permitting activities.”

In conclusion, in September 2017, Stats SA noted that the mining industry, as at Q2 2017, had expanded by 3.9 percent due to increased production of coal, gold and ‘other’ metal ores such as iron ore and manganese ore. It was mining’s second consecutive quarter of growth. With hope for a modest upswing in the mining industry possibly on the horizon, it remains more critical than ever to ensure that ‘safety first’ remains at the top of the agenda and, further, that it keeps up with the best that local and global safety trends have to offer.

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The mining industry has long been represented at A-OSH 2018, Africa’s largest occupational health and safety (OHS) expo, where all aspects of safety, security and health at work are brought together. The eighth A-OSH EXPO takes place from 22 to 24 May 2018 at Gallagher Convention Centre, Midrand, providing a platform for knowledge exchange and relationship building, and the sharing of information on the latest thinking, products, trends and legislation. A-OSH EXPO 2017 reached in excess of 2,600 visitors throughout the industry, from 21 different countries. Find out more at www.aosh.co.za

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