



MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Dust-related lung diseases overshadow mine accidents

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For immediate release

Mining deaths and injuries continue to plague South Africa's mines and remains a serious cause of concern according to the Bench Marks Foundation.

With 123 deaths in 2011 and 22 deaths and 403 injuries already reported by the Department of Mineral Resources between January and March this year, the Foundation welcomes the recent safety drive embarked on by the Department to reduce the high incidence of fatalities experienced in the mining sector.

"But these figures are no doubt conservative. If for example, one had to add the number of people who have died as a result of respiratory diseases that they contracted through mining throughout the years to the above figures, the statistics I'm sure would be frightening" says John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation.

The figures regarding deaths and injuries in mining were reported by the Department of Mineral Resources in a news briefing earlier this year where the minister launched the department's safety drive in order to cut the high number of fatalities in the industry. Minister Shabangu reported a 40% drop in injuries and a drop of only 18.5% in deaths compared to the same period in 2011.

Says Capel: "As an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility especially in the mining industry, we interact with current and past miners in order to research the CSR practices of this sector as well as the communities surrounding the mines.

"We come across many miners who are suffering from the effects of being exposed to harmful dusts released through mining. And whilst those who are in the employ of mines have access to health care and affordable medicine, those who are medically boarded or retrenched do not."

Capel said that dust-related lung diseases overshadow mine accidents in the number of workers affected and it is alarming that the long-term effects of inhalation exposure does not get as much attention or focus as it should.

"We have found that mines are still under-reporting the health effects of dusts and we therefore welcome the various legal cases that are coming to the aid of the hundreds of thousands of people who are affected by the various diseases related to the exposure of dusts such as silica.

"What is also worrying us is the increase in respiratory problems in communities surrounding the mines. With re-mining occurring throughout South Africa and the mines utilising road transport to transport their minerals, there is a marked increase in dust levels.

“We have found that in some areas, such as in the Bojanala District in the North West Province, medical staff are increasingly reporting high incidences of respiratory problems amongst members of the general public. More people are suffering from asthma and lung ailments than before.

“With this in mind, how many more deaths will eventually be attributed to mining in the not too distant future if steps are not taken to curb the effects of exposure to these dangerous dusts?”

ENDS

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation mandated by churches to monitor the practices of multi-national corporations to

- ensure they respect human rights;
- protect the environment;
- ensure that profit-making is not done at the expense of other interest groups; and
- ensure that those most negatively impacted upon are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporations.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Foundation in 2001 and the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka chairs the organisation.

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