

MOSH ANNUAL MINE DUST CONFERENCE 2025

Speaking notes: Mine Dust Conference
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“A Clarion Call to Action towards Elimination of Occupational Diseases”

Good morning, dumelang, molweni, goeie môre.

Thank you for the kind invitation for me to give the keynote speech at this Mine Dust Conference. It is an honour that I appreciate.

Improving the health of every mining employee within the South African Mining Industry is a topic which is very close to my heart, and I further believe it should also be close to the hearts of everyone in this audience.

Mine dust has been a challenge for the industry, since the discovery of gold in 1886. In the past 139 years, we have fought a relentless battle to control dust.

As we continue to intensify our efforts towards the elimination of dust and occupational lung diseases within the industry, let us take a moment to reflect on the impact of these diseases on employees affected, their families and communities at large.

The prevalence of occupational lung diseases, such as silicosis, asbestosis and coal miners' pneumoconiosis within our industry is a challenge that requires our immediate and continued attention for the protection of the health of our employees.

The impact of Occupational Lung Diseases places additional financial pressure on those affected as it leads to incapacity, loss of income and additional medical costs. This impact extends to households as there are additional responsibilities on families, such as providing personal care to those affected. The mental health toll is indescribable as an employee loses his/her status as a breadwinner and becomes a burden on the family.

Occupational lung diseases also result in significant annual costs to the South African Mining Industry and the South African economy through the loss of skilled labour, not to mention the costs involved in managing and redressing the impact of the diseases.



When we do not prevent occupational lung diseases through prevention, this leads to compensation for those that contract lung diseases. At last count, according to the DMPR's Annual Inspectorate Report, there were 230 cases of silicosis and 12 of CWP in 2023. Although these numbers are markedly down on previous years, this is still too many cases of people that can potentially develop debilitating disease in years to come. Hence, we need to do more to prevent this calamity.

As an industry, we also do not want further litigation due to occupational lung diseases, as has happened with gold, where the Tshiamiso Trust had to be established to provide additional compensation for mainly silicosis and TB. We see this being repeated in the coal sector, where the expert on class action litigation, Mr Richard Spoor, is now serving notice on coal companies for a similar class action suit.

So what have we done thus far as an industry?

Despite these enormous challenges, the SAMI together with its stakeholders has continued to collaborate in identifying initiatives, strategies and opportunities to curb the scourge of OLD. These include:

- The establishment of the MOSH Learning Hub in 2008, with dust being one of four focal areas. This Dust team facilitated the identification and adoption of numerous leading practices with the potential to reduce the risk of occupational lung diseases.
- The Minerals Council CEO Zero Harm Forum, where initiatives on dust control are shared. One of the successes of this forum was its approval of a Framework on Post-employment Care, focused on OLDs. Some of the outputs of this Framework are educational materials on occupational lung diseases, and a commitment to a database of current and ex-mineworkers that will assist with surveillance of employees that worked in controlled mines.
- Very close collaboration with the MBOD/CCOD. The Minerals Council has in the past decade provided financial support to these institutions that led to massive improvements in the functioning of the organisations, to the benefit of mineworkers.

Other initiatives are:

- Collaboration at the Mine Health and Safety Council for the development, promulgation and continuous review of the Mine Health & Safety Legislation (MHSA Act and Related Mandatory COP's).
- Participating in mining research through institutions such as the MHSC & the Mandela Mining Precinct e.g. (RTIMS – real time information management systems).

We are also proud of our work, as a collective, in setting milestone targets to improve health and safety within the SAMI. One of these milestones is towards the elimination of Occupational Lung Diseases. In 2003, we set a target that 5% of all crystalline silica dust samples should be below the OEL then, which was 0.1mg/m³. We adjusted this to half the OEL in 2014. Each time we set these milestones, they seemed unachievable.

We have however, learnt one lesson in the past 2 decade, "It always seems impossible, until it's done." A wise quote from our former President, Nelson Mandela.

The South African Mining Industry has done well over the past 10-years to improve its performance on the Milestones and have improved from more than 16% of samples exceeding the milestone for respirable crystalline silica dust in 2015 to only 5.9% of samples exceeding

the respirable crystalline silica dust milestone by December 2024. Regarding Respirable Coal Dust, the industry improved from 15% of samples exceeding the milestone in 2015 to just over 10% of samples exceeding the respirable coal dust milestone by December 2024.

These improvements were a great rehearsal for the current reduced OELs in the industry.

Despite the good performance observed over the years, which indicates that we are on the right trajectory, we still need to cross the finishing line, which is, eliminating occupational lung diseases. That is the purpose of this Dust Conference.

Today is aimed at providing reflections of where we come from, where we are currently, but most importantly where we need to go in regarding dust risk management within our industry. It is aimed at ensuring alignment of all relevant stakeholders on what needs to be done going forward.

Therefore, I would like the delegates here to “Turn a new leaf on Dust Risk Management within SAMI”, and take this opportunity to identify areas of further learning, to practice adoption and collaboration for the betterment of the Health & Safety of our employees.

Our responsibility as industry leaders and stakeholders is to continue raising the bar and foster a step change in eliminating occupational lung diseases in the mining industry. Zero Harm is possible, by working together, by diligently sharing best practices. Through the development and adoption of Leading Practices, we can achieve our industry occupational health milestones and make a meaningful contribution to improving the health of all our employees.

Thank you.