

Prioritising safety on small mines

The Department of Minerals has called on smaller mines to adhere to safety, health, environment and quality (Sheq) regulations following statistics that reveal only a marginal decrease in the amount of fatalities on these mines last year.

Thabo Dube, DMR deputy chief inspector of mines addressed safety issues during a presentation to members of the Aggregate and Sand Producers Association of Southern Africa (Aspasa) prior to the association's annual general meeting in Kempton Park recently. He said measures to curb accidents, as well as prevent the spread of sicknesses among workers needs to be implemented by the industry in association with the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR).

"Despite steady progress being made to improve the health and safety of miners in small and medium sized mines the industry is not meeting milestones set by the industry in 2003. Since then better management of disease and sickness on mines, as well as the implementation of safer systems has indeed led to an overall improvement, but there is still more that needs to be done.

"Part of the problem is that these smaller mines fall into the category of "other" in the department's classification of mines and as a result do not have specific industry related guidelines to assist miners in managing risks," he said.

Differing needs

Aspasa members, for example, excavate sand and stone from pits and quarries where heavy machinery and vehicles are the main dangers. Issues like working beneath the surface of the earth, tunnelling or inhalation of gasses does not really effect these miners, yet legislation and guidelines lump them together with all other mining types.

Dube said that the department is moving towards aligning safety and health standards with certain individual sectors of the industry, as well as promulgating legislation that is specific for small mines. He sighted Australia as an example of how well such a system can work as its systems are aligned to different sectors including small miners.

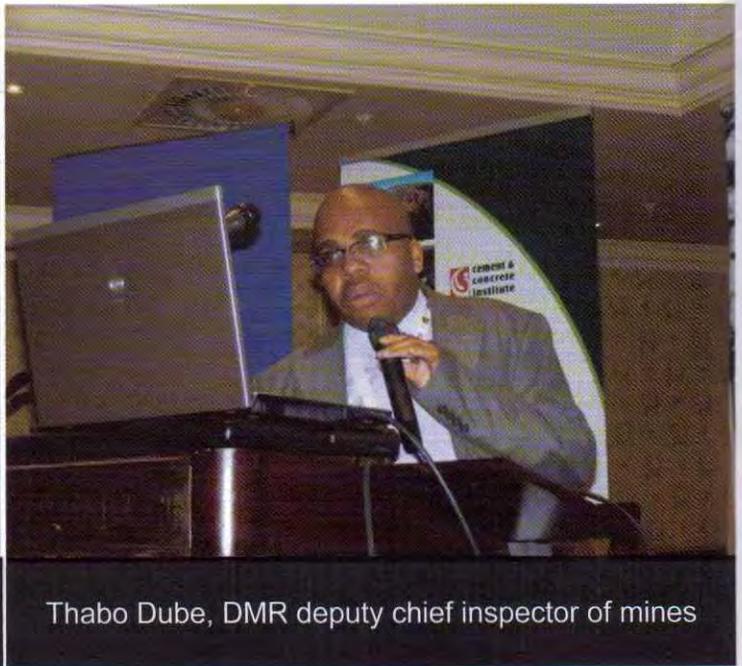
"We should pool resources in the small mine sector to address issues relating to Sheq as well as training. By sharing resources with related miners we can develop and share best practices as well as look at establishing education and training facilities to address skills shortages."

Aspasa director, Nico Pienaar, applauded the DMR efforts to regulate individual sectors.

"Aspasa is actively involved with the DMR to address SHEQ issues within the industry and although our members' safety and health records are comparatively good we are committed to establishing world-class standards within all our member operation," he concluded.



Aspasa director Nico Pienaar



Thabo Dube, DMR deputy chief inspector of mines