

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

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### **MINERALS COUNCIL SOUTH AFRICA NOTES SIGNIFICANT HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS IN MINING IN THE PAST DECADE**

**Cape Town, 6 February 2024.** The South African mining industry had a regrettable regression during 2023 on its journey towards zero harm, but the overall trend in safety and health in the past decade shows that interventions to make mining safer and healthier have gained significant traction, the Minerals Council South Africa says.

In 2014, the mining industry set health safety milestones in its quest for zero harm, targeting the causes of fatalities, injuries and health with focused interventions, making significant inroads into the addressing these challenges.

This year, the Minerals Council and its members will assess the industry's performance over the past decade, learning from what has worked, and reinvigorate successful interventions to eliminate fatalities and make the sector a healthy work environment. The industry will continue sharing and adopting global leading practices, introducing modern, innovative mining methods, and relentlessly drive changes in health and safety cultures at mining operations, says Japie Fullard, Chair of the CEO Zero Harm Forum.

The industry, led by the Minerals Council, and in collaboration with the Department of Minerals Resources and Energy (DMRE), organised labour, and through company-specific programmes to directly engage employees, has made significant progress on the journey towards zero harm in the past decade, with a 42% decline to a record low of 49 fatalities in 2022 from 84 reported in 2014.

Through concerted initiatives, fatalities arising from falls-of-ground and transportation-and-mining, the two historical leading causes of deaths and injuries, have fallen by 83% and 43% respectively between 2014 and 2022. Injuries declined by 19%.

Disappointingly, the number of fatalities in the South African mining industry regressed during 2023 after its record safety performance the year before. The Minerals Council cannot release final figures for 2023 until the DMRE has formally announced safety statistics for last year and the health statistics for 2022, which lag by a one year.



“Before the single incident in November in which 13 employees died, we were tracking well compared to 2022 and we were trending well on our path to zero harm. It was a real shock for the industry, but it was heart-warming to see the industry pull together and help and assist that company in emergency responses and offers of support. That was very encouraging. Safety is not a competition and we are all in this together,” says Mr Fullard.

“We share safety learnings amongst ourselves as CEOs and executives and we take this process very seriously. On the first working day of every month, mining company CEOs and executives meet for an Hour of Learning hosted by the Minerals Council to have open and frank discussions about safety incidents, what the causes were, and what measures we can all implement to avoid repeats,” he says.

Over the long term, the mining industry has made significant progress in the health of miner employees. Although there was an increase in occupational diseases reported in the industry in 2022 compared to 2021, there was a decrease of about one third in the number of occupational health diseases reported by the industry in 2022 compared to 2019, which was the year before the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic distorted health statistics in 2020 and 2021 as there was under-reporting, says Dr Thuthula Balfour, the Head of Health at the Minerals Council.

There has been a more than 75% decrease in occupational health diseases in the mining industry since 2008 to 2022, with declines of more than 80% in tuberculosis and silicosis cases. Noise-induced hearing loss cases have declined by more than 50% and this area is a major focus of intervention by the industry to adopt quieter equipment to protect employees’ hearing.

The Minerals Council is a partner with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in the Mandela Mining Precinct, South Africa’s largest private-public partnership, to improve health, safety and productivity by modernising mining through technology solutions.

One of the leading breakthroughs to date is the development of the Isidingo Drill, which is a lighter, quieter, faster and more ergonomic machine for underground drilling compared to traditional drills. It has opened the rock-drilling profession to women for the first time, says Sietse Van Der Woude, the Senior Executive of Modernisation and Safety at the Minerals Council.

A scraping system to remove blasted rock out of working areas has been fitted with a system to automatically shut down if it detects people nearby. This system is currently in a test programme at a major mining company.

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