MINERALS COUNCIL
SOUTH AFRICA

Shaping a sustainable coal future: Focussing on Health, Safety and Environment
Address at Coal Safe 2026
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Honourable Minister Mantashe, industry leaders, esteemed participants, and colleagues, good morning.

It is a singular honour to be part of this momentous occasion and to be afforded the opportunity to present reflections and insights on sustainable coal mining, one of the most consequential issues facing our sector today. I am privileged to contribute from the perspective that health, safety, and environmental stewardship are not adjuncts to sustainability, but its foundation.

Coal has undeniably shaped global industrialisation, economic development, and employment. At the same time, we recognise its environmental footprint. We are now firmly in an era where coal mining must—and is—evolving through modernisation, emissions reduction, and responsible land rehabilitation. This is the essence of sustainable coal stewardship.

In South Africa, mining remains central to economic and social stability. The sector contributes nearly 6% to GDP and employs approximately 470,000 people. Coal generated R195 billion in sales in 2025 and employs close to 96,000 South Africans who earned R36 billion to support their families. These figures represent livelihoods, communities, and regional economies. As we diversify our energy mix, we must be acutely aware of the human consequences of unconsidered or abrupt decisions.

Coal's role in South Africa is characterised by an unavoidable duality. It continues to provide more than 82% of the country's electricity supply and remains vital to grid stability in a system constrained by ageing infrastructure, limited dispatchable capacity, and rising demand. Improvements across parts of the coal fleet have contributed to reducing load shedding at critical moments, underscoring coal's continued role in energy security and economic continuity.

The choice before us is not a binary one between coal and renewables, but a complex task of managing transition responsibly — preserving baseload reliability, enabling growth and poverty alleviation, while progressively reducing emissions.

This is not about the premature exclusion of coal, but a deliberate shift toward lower-emission pathways through technology, efficiency, abatement, and diversification. Coal will continue to

play a role alongside renewables, gas, and emerging solutions in a technology-neutral system aligned with national circumstances and development priorities.

These realities intersect with the global demand for critical minerals essential to the energy transition—an opportunity South Africa is positioning for through its Critical Minerals and Metals Strategy, while recognising coal's ongoing strategic importance. Navigating this transition requires investment in cleaner coal technologies, disciplined rehabilitation, skills transition, and industrial capability, ensuring coal-dependent workers and communities are supported. Initiatives such as the South African B20 Legacy Project demonstrate that mining, when done responsibly, can be a constructive and transformative force.

The industry is already advancing energy efficiency and sustainability-linked investments. More than 1.8 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity has been introduced to support decarbonisation, energy security, and cost stability, while strengthening health and safety outcomes.

At the Minerals Council, we are clear: safety and sustainability are inseparable imperatives. Safety" is concerned with the prevention of injuries, fatalities, and occupational illness, while "sustainability" addresses environmental impacts, the protection of employees and communities over the long term, and the assurance of responsible closure and rehabilitation of mining operations. Mining companies manage these imperatives through integrated systems that identify risk, enforce standards, and drive continuous improvement.

Environmental responsibility is no longer optional. Investors demand adherence to global ESG standards, and core safety disciplines such as hazard identification and risk assessment, have direct implications for environmental integrity and worker health.

The coal sector's safety performance reflects the benefits of mechanisation and focused interventions. In 2026 year-to-date, the industry has recorded 19 fatalities and 460 injuries, with coal contributing no fatal incidents and 51 injuries. This builds on 2025, which included extended zero-fatality periods, demonstrating that fatality-free performance is both achievable and repeatable. We believe Zero Harm will be achieved.

That said, this cannot breed complacency. High-energy risks—particularly transport and equipment interactions—remain ever-present and demand relentless discipline, especially in contractor and non-routine work environments.

Khumbul'ekhaya Version 2.0 marks a decisive shift from incremental improvement toward the elimination of fatal risks through engineering controls, critical control verification, and leadership accountability. Building on the successes from the previous version of Khumbul'ekhaya, the coal sector is well positioned to lead this next phase and demonstrate what sustained Zero Harm performance looks like in practice.

We envision mining as a provider of a safe, healthy, and sustainable future, producing the minerals essential to the energy transition while ensuring no harm to people or the environment. As Sir Ernest Oppenheimer reminded the industry, *"the aim of mining is to mine*

profitably and leave behind something of lasting value." That principle is as relevant today as ever.
"One Voice" is therefore critical. Zero Harm requires clear, courageous leadership, decisive action when standards are compromised, and absolute consistency in execution. Accountability must sit with every individual, from the CEO to the most junior employee. Through sustained cooperation and CEO-led leadership, the industry is on a downward trajectory in fatalities, injuries, and occupational disease. Today's coal miner is healthier than two decades ago, with materially lower rates of pneumo-coniosis, TB, and noise-induced hearing loss—driven by mechanisation, improved living conditions, and reduced exposures.

We believe that Zero Harm is achievable, and we are seeing that becoming a reality in the coal industry.

Environmentally responsible mining goes beyond compliance. It requires leadership in water stewardship, climate adaptation, nature-positive practices, and alignment with international benchmarks such as the ICMM Mining Principles, IRMA, and TSM. We recognise the legacy challenges of historical mining, including acid mine drainage and tailings dust, and have learnt from them. Today, precision-driven water and tailings management, concurrent rehabilitation, and land restoration are central pillars of environmental safety.

Sustainable mine closure demands foresight beyond the life of the mine—supporting future land uses such as agriculture, tourism, or renewable energy, while safeguarding environmental and community health. Mining success is ultimately measured not by tonnes extracted, but by resilient communities that endure long after closure.

Mining is more than an economic activity—it is a social commitment. Through targeted investment in education, healthcare, enterprise development, and Social and Labour Plans, the sector contributes to safer environments, stronger health outcomes, and lasting opportunity. The true legacy of mining lies in prosperous communities anchored in strong health, safety, and environmental foundations.

In the spirit of *"One Voice, One Industry, One Sustainable Future,"* we remain committed to shaping a sustainable coal future grounded in safety, health, and environmental stewardship.
Thank you.
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