

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINING INDUSTRY PREPAREDNESS FOR CONTINUING PHASE UP OF OPERATIONS

Johannesburg, 28 April 2020: The Minerals Council South Africa is pleased to be able to note the partial resumption of mining activities since the amendment of the 16 April Disaster Management Act regulations, which will be reinforced by the switch to the Level 4 alert status announced by President Ramaphosa on 23 April.

While it is too early to assess accurately the impact of the new situation on the state of the industry, the Minerals Council continues to applaud government's well-considered and decisive approach to the COVID-19 crisis faced in South Africa and around the world.

The Minerals Council has noted concerns from some parties regarding the care that mining companies have taken, and will take, as production is phased up in the sector. The industry is extremely conscious of the responsibilities it faces in these unprecedented circumstances. No doubt, as the economy more broadly begins its own opening up process with the switch on 1 May to Level 4, employers in many sectors face similar responsibilities.

The Minerals Council, in close co-operation with member companies' occupational health experts and others, and in engagements through the Mine Health and Safety Council with experts from government and organised labour, has been monitoring the situation closely since January and taking a range of actions. This work has been conducted through the Minerals Council's Health Policy Committee. These engagements and actions have always been based on engagement with, and information from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), and through the use of materials provided by the WHO.

Based on these engagements, from early February the Minerals Council began providing members with material on mitigation measures against the virus.

By early March, two weeks before the declaration of the state of disaster and before the first diagnosis in South Africa, member companies were operating in terms of a Minerals Council 10-point action plan. This involved, in brief, employee education, health worker readiness, use of masks, sanitisers and temperature monitors, proactive influenza vaccinations, dealing with immunocompromised employees, management of suspected cases or contacts of cases, provision for isolation of employees where required, travel advice, industry reporting, communication and monitoring.



With the 27 March lockdown and the restrictions on mining to essential mining, such as coal supplies to Eskom, and care and maintenance, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed both for the limited work continuing, and for an eventual return to work.

From the earliest days of the lockdown, DMRE inspections have been taking place at mine and processing plants with the full co-operation of the mining companies. The SOP itself has been updated at times as knowledge of the virus has advanced, and this will continue based on advice from all relevant experts.

The SOP deals with procedures to be followed before the return of employees; infection prevention, screening and referrals after their return; isolation areas; practices such as employee training, PPE use, hygiene precautions and physical distancing; and, finally, reporting.

It should be clear that, while the prime responsibility for ensuring the effective implementation of all these measures, and any others that may be prescribed by law, rests with management; effective implementation rests with all involved, including employees themselves, their elected representatives and the regulator.

Minerals Council members are conscious that people are employees for only a part of their time, and they are also individuals with families and friends. This is what lies behind companies, in addition to doing their utmost to ensure health and safety in the workplace, also having made significant contributions to salaries of those who have been unable to work, made donations to the Business for SA Solidarity Fund and other funds, and carried out additional community projects.

The 16 April amendments to the Disaster Management Act regulations permitted operation up to 50% capacity and introduced workplace regulations through that medium. The shift to Level 4 will see further developments in this regard.

The Minerals Council wishes to make it clear that it is not in any way averse to the regulation of workplaces in terms of COVID-19 directives and regulations by the DMRE inspectorate, as is the case in respect of other health and safety matters.

The Minerals Council would be happy for the SOP and any other relevant material based on expert opinion be made part of the regulatory framework.

The industry is also open and committed to transparency on these matters.

The Minerals Council has, for some weeks, been maintaining a COVID-19 portal <https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/minerals-council-position-on-covid-19> which has all materials produced, including that referred to in this statement.

It includes a dashboard, that is updated daily, showing COVID-19 cases in the industry by commodity and province. As of 27 April, the industry had experienced nine cases, none of which have been through on-mine transmission. All appropriate steps were taken in respect of contact-tracing and quarantine. There have been no deaths in the industry due to COVID-19.

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