

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINERALS COUNCIL AND MEMBER COMPANIES COLLABORATE TO FIGHT STIGMATISATION OF COVID-19

Johannesburg, 2 July 2020: As part of its overall drive to fight COVID-19 and in the implementation of its 10-point plan, the Minerals Council South Africa and its members place a great deal of emphasis on education and communication both for employees and communities. Nationally and internationally the issue of stigmatisation of COVID-19 has significant ramifications for reporting, for behaviour and for people getting treatment.

Stigmatisation is driven by fear, particularly the fear of the unknown. In mining, we recognise that stigmatisation has an impact at various levels:

- At a community level, stigmatisation may not only have an impact on the way in which mineworkers may be perceived in communities, but also in the way in which individuals and groups within communities behave and are treated. Fear of stigmatisation may lead to irresponsible behaviour, such as people not wearing masks out of concern that they may be seen as being ill; not reporting when they are ill; and even not getting treatment when they need it which may result in complications and even death.
- At a company level, stigmatisation could result in a lack of support for individuals who are ill or apportioning blame to those who are infected as if their infection is something they brought onto themselves.
- At an individual level, this could result in a lack of reporting by affected people for fear of discrimination and prejudice, as well as the denial of symptoms and risks. And, in some cases, could lead to irresponsible behaviour as individuals believe they will not be affected simply because of who they are, not how they behave.

The Minerals Council and its members are making every effort to address stigmatisation by:

- Building trust in health services and company support mechanisms
- Providing sufficient understandable and practical information in a non-judgmental and transparent way.

- Showing empathy and care for those who are affected.
- Providing practical avenues that individuals can and should follow to protect themselves and others, both in the prevention of illness and also in the event that they do contract the virus.

During a media briefing today, Minerals Council members shared some of the approaches that they are taking to dealing with stigma and risk behaviour.

Exxaro Resources shared examples of the company's campaign to directly address stigma by focussing on 10 basic truths, and in so doing calling out myths. Some of these basic truths are:

- COVID-19 affects people of all ethnic groups
- People of all ages can get seriously ill.
- A face mask does not mean someone is infected.
- You are no longer infectious once you have recovered.

The campaign has not only been driven intensely within the company, but also in communities through street pole advertising. A further component on the campaign has been to use 'real' people as part of the initiative, including people who have been ill and recovered.

Seriti Resources shared details of the way in which the company sought to pre-empt any stigmatisation of employees who had recovered from COVID-19 when returning to work. The key messages of this campaign, led by the CEO, were to: remind everyone of the company's core values; that virus is not picky and does not discriminate – anyone can get it; that finding cases early is a good thing and shows that the systems work; and that after 14 days of isolation, individuals will be virus free. This was supported by a range of materials – a brief, posters, meetings, and messaging on the company's mobile app.

In its presentation Harmony illustrated how it was dealing with the issue of quarantine, educating people within the company and in the community, what quarantine entailed, why it is necessary. Harmony's programme included print material, live reads on radio and active engagement with individuals who were quarantined when they returned to work or as a result of contact tracing.

Finally, Gold Fields' South Deep mine spoke about the mine's holistic and multi-platform approach to communication and education that encompasses the full life of an employee – at work, at home, in his/her community and while commuting. South Deep's programme incorporates myth-busting and the provision of factual information and runs on a number of platforms – briefs, videos, posters, WhatsApp channel and Facebook. Importantly, it reaches out to and extends into the community, encouraging employees to be ambassadors and educators.

The presentation on some of these initiatives may be found at:

<https://www.mineralscouncil.org.za/downloads/send/68-covid-19/1101-covid-19-update-02-july-2020>

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