

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Fact sheet



MINERALS COUNCIL
SOUTH AFRICA



Harmony

“Exposure to various health risks in the workplace has been well documented and managed over the years.”

As mineworkers need to maintain optimal physical and mental health, a number of mining organisations have developed holistic programmes to manage lifestyle diseases, fatigue and financial fitness.

Exposure to various health risks in the workplace has been well documented and managed over the years with occupational hygiene programmes and health monitoring regimes, which have proven effective.

The psychological effects of the mining environment are not as well understood as the physical risks, however. Anecdotal evidence and research show that the challenges are almost the same as in any other workplace.

Some risks specific to the mining environment are evident among women employed within the sector. Women in mining face many challenges, ranging from physical threats to functional difficulties and various forms of discrimination – all addressed by mining companies and the industry at large over the past decade through diversity programmes, research and ergonomic solutions.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

A number of mining companies have partnered with prominent academic institutions in developing methodologies to assess psychological fitness to work. Employers are thus able to identify and intervene at an early stage.

Following an accident or fatality, most mining companies provide in-house or outsourced clinical psychology services that help employees work through the traumatic experience.

QUICK FACTS

4,483



OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES
(4,632 IN 2016)

1,141



NOISE INDUCED HEARING LOSS
CASES (966 IN 2016)

652



SILICOSIS CASES REPORTED
(635 IN 2016)

2,247



TB CASES REPORTED
(2,580 IN 2016)

* The health data is only available up to 2017

FITNESS TO WORK

The risk presented by fatigue is managed by means of specific occupational health and safety management plans implemented by each mine.

Fatigue (a symptom of over-exertion) is a state of physical and mental impairment that reduces alertness and performance. Employees often complain of feeling lethargic, exhausted and tired.

Fatigue is multi-faceted but often associated with an individual's circadian rhythm (sleep-wake cycles).

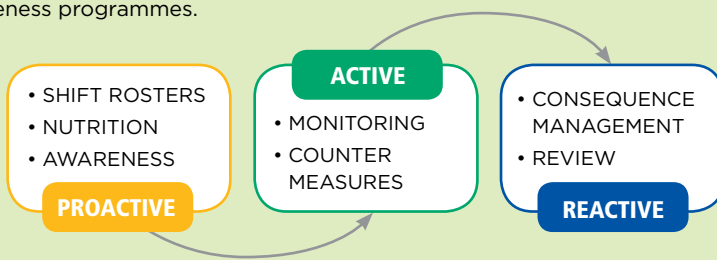
If not managed properly, the effects of fatigue are dangerous mentally and physically, leading to debilitating depression, keeping employees away from work, reducing productivity and increasing the risk of occupational injuries.

Researchers at the University of Western Australia have suggested the following interventions:

- Ensure there is sufficient cover for staff on annual or sick leave. If overtime is necessary, plan for it so employees can schedule their activities around it, and limit overtime to ensure staff have sufficient breaks between shifts.
- Limit overtime for staff working long shifts in accordance with organisational policy (which should be based on a risk assessment of the workplace).
- Ensure the shift roster provides for continuous seven to eight hours of sleep in every 24 hours, and at least 50 hours of sleep every seven days. If it is a rotating three-shift roster system, forward rotation (day/afternoon/night) should be used.
- Sleep debt should be managed by limiting consecutive night shifts to four and night shifts should end by 08:00.
- It is important to ensure that there is a minimum of 12 hours between consecutive shifts.
- A roster must always allow for at least two full nights' sleep after the last night shift.
- Short naps of 15 to 20 minutes during a shift should be allowed if possible.

FATIGUE MANAGEMENT

A multi-dimensional risk strategy, fatigue management includes a number of proactive monitoring and reactive measures, as well as education and awareness programmes.



SPECIFIC MINIMUM STANDARDS

The Department of Mineral Resources requires mining companies to ensure that employees meet specific minimum standards of fitness to perform work, and provides guidelines for a mandatory code of practice on risk-based fatigue management.

Fitness assessments consider records of medical history, including clinical examinations, blood tests and diagnostic radiology, in determining fitness to perform specific jobs on a mine.

Wellness encompasses more than fitness to work, however. It is about preventing disease. Practically, this means eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly and achieving work-life balance. It also advocates regular health screening for common diseases, such as HIV, and lifestyle ailments (such as hypertension, diabetes and cancer). It is also important to manage stress through counselling.

“Wellness encompasses more than fitness to work.”



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