ERPM launches Aids programme

"Aids is not the end; it is a chronic disease like high blood pressure or diabetes, and can be managed accordingly." With these words, Dr Khotso Nicholo, manager of the Caritas Care Home, described ERPM’s HIV/Aids management programme at an Aids awareness day held at the Far East Vertical (FEV) shift on 6 September. Caritas Care Home, which operates from premises donated by ERPM, opened in 2002 and now treats some 1 700 people from the wider Ekurhuleni area. "It treats some 1 700 people from ERPM, opened in 2002 and now operates from premises donated by O'Reity's Gubeka. The programme has resident facilities for the aged and chronically ill, a hospice centre in Springs and a network of home-based care givers operating in Boksburg. "Employees still believe that if you declare your HIV status, you will be 'boarded': this is not true, and many more lives will be saved if people come forward," Caritas’s programme, which includes free anti-retroviral therapy (ART), was inaugurated in 2005. UNHCRs and associations, ERPM management, the Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa (Denosa), Life Health Care and the Phomolong Community Centre were also represented at the event. In his talk, General Manager Manny da Silva thanked all present for attending, particularly the people of ERPM. "ERPM is a mine that has faced tough times and survived," he said. "Our survival is a tribute to our people, who would not give up. Now that we have the resources, we will be able to ensure that people living with disease are treated with dignity and assured of a good quality of life."

This theme was reinforced by Denosa representative M S Dineo. "No man is an island: HIV/AIDS is the business of everyone. The most important people here today are the workers, and they can now rest assured that AIDS is not a death sentence, but can be managed like any other illness." The Phomolong community centre, a multi-faceted healthcare organisation based in Ekurhuleni, was represented by O'Reity's Gubeka. Phomolong's services include residential facilities for the aged and chronically ill, a hospice centre in Springs and a network of home-based care givers operating in Boksburg. The event concluded with an information-sharing session, with informative leaflets being distributed to employees.

The team of peer educators will complete their training for TB peer educators. The project, “Beating the deadly duo” - TB and HIV/AIDS, is closely associated with HIV. The immune system of HIV-positive people is weakened, and they are therefore more susceptible to other illnesses - known as opportunistic infections - including TB. As part of the preparations for World Aids Day on 1 December, Tsietsi and Healthshare (Blyvoor’s outsourced health care provider) have put together a new approach to HIV/Aids targeting not only employees but the wider Blyvoor community. "The focus of the HIV-related campaign will be education, empowering people with the knowledge to practise safe sex. This will reinforce Healthshare's comprehensive counselling and wellness programme," says Employee Relations Officer Paul Leonderts. Training for TB peer educators - 13 to date - was completed in early October, through a joint venture with Healthshare and the local health department. "TB is a highly infectious condition, but can be cured," says Paul. "It is critical, though, that people take the complete course of medication as prescribed. If you are on TB medication, and miss one day, your body immediately starts building up resistance to the drugs." 62 employees (out of a total workforce of 4 119) are currently being treated for TB at Blyvoor. The team of peer educators will not be giving formal presentations, but will engage with people in the workplace to talk to them about how TB is spread, its symptoms, and - most importantly - the vital importance of completing treatment exactly as prescribed.

"There's been a lot of cooperation in the media lately about multi-drug resistant TB (known as XDR TBL)," says Paul. "This type of TB, which cannot be cured, develops when people interrupt their medication: the virus mutates and new strains of the disease develop, which do not respond to any of the currently known drugs."
We begin this issue’s Safety Report with an extract from A Mining Prayer, written by a DRDGOLD SA employee.

was 6.96, compared with 7.93 in the second quarter. This is attributable to two seismic events, which resulted in the fatal accident on 28 July and injured 40 other employees,” says Phillip. “These latter events resulted in a regression in all accident rates this quarter. This is because the barometer system, which enables us to analyse the risk that people are exposed to in different workplaces, begins, is being successfully implemented at both operations. We have also implemented a risk barometer system, which enables us to analyse the risk that people are exposed to in different workplaces, and conditions,” says Phillip.

Group Safety Co-ordinator Phillip Walters comments that reportable injuries at ERPM and Crown. ERPM’s rate for the quarter was 6.96, compared with 7.93 in the second quarter. This is attributable to two seismic events, which resulted in the fatal accident on 28 July and injured 40 other employees,” says Phillip. “These latter events resulted in a regression in all accident rates this quarter. This is because the barometer system, which enables us to analyse the risk that people are exposed to in different workplaces, begins, is being successfully implemented at both operations. We have also implemented a risk barometer system, which enables us to analyse the risk that people are exposed to in different workplaces, and conditions,” says Phillip.

In Memoriam
With deep regret, we record the death of one employee of DRDGOLD SA in a mine-related accident during the September quarter. Team leader Augustino Lebaka died on 26 July in a seismically-related rockfall at Blyvoor’s No 5 Shaft complex. Augustino, who came from Lesotho, had worked for DRDGOLD SA since 1982. Our sincere condolences go to his wife and family.

SAFETY REPORT
We begin this issue’s Safety Report with an extract from A Mining Prayer, written by a DRDGOLD SA employee.

We pray this in the name of Your son, Jesus – Amen.

The Blyvoor training centre
Blyvoor’s training centre achieved provisional accreditation from the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) on 1 August. The accreditation covers the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programme, and the Competent Persons A and B training required by safety legislation to ensure that all mining crews and team leaders have the necessary skills to ensure the safety of underground working places.

There are 197 learners enrolled on the ABET programme, from levels 1 to 4, and 179 learners enrolled for Competent Person A and B training in September. “The Blyvoor training centre was only established in May 2005, after the closure of North West Operations,” says Quality Co-coordinator M and K. “Certification is quite a complex process, and a lot of training centre staff met the MQA’s requirements for assessors and moderators, and finally to design appropriate outcomes-based learning material.” MQA representatives will audit the ABET programme on 29 November, and full accreditation is expected in February 2008.

Izikho loqeqesho laseBlyvoor liphumelela uuvanyo
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The Blyvoor training centre
DRDGOLD SA have embarked on a major drive to foster talent in the organisation.

Feeding the talent pipeline

The three operations of DRDGOLD SA have embarked on a major drive to foster talent in the organisation.

A major employee equity forum, on which the mine's managers and employees participated, was held at the mine and from the surrounding community. This forum aimed to feed the talent pipeline feeding into the company's management and organised labour are both represented.

Six of the learners will study engineering, four will study mining, and one will study survey and metallurgy. ERPM's selection process was completed in August, with seven mining and five engineering learners. “We also had very strong interest, with over 50 applicants,” says Assistant HR Manager Louis Klein. “Four of these will study mining and five engineering. We had more than 100 applications initially, from the mine and from the surrounding community. This was whittled down to a short list of 17 candidates, who went through a further process of interviews with the mine’s General Manager Manny da Silva (left) and Assistant HR Manager Buthi Bilane (right) at a group briefing session held for the ERPM learners on 8 August.

All learnerships will comprise a balance of theoretical training – through the Gold Fields Academy, based at Kloof Mine near Carletonville – and practical experience on the job. The programme to plant the side slopes is in place to reduce the generation of dust from the tailings dams. This year, 5.7 hectares of residue dams have been vegetated to date, with 14.3 hectares remaining, using indigenous plant species where possible.

Sand dumps currently being mined are situated at City Deep, Crown and Knights plants. Dust suppression techniques include water sprays on top of the working face and water monitors on the floor areas, which spray water against the dump face and floor areas. On average, spraying for dust control uses some eight million litres of water per month, with a combined monthly water and electricity cost of some R361 000.

The techniques we’re perfecting now will be applied when we start operations at the Top Star Dump,” says Louis. “Being so close to the Johannesburg CBD, this will be a unique and challenging environment. The Naires dumps being graded are within a couple of kilometres of the FNB stadium, earmarked as both the opening and closing venue for the Soccer World in 2010, so it’s critical to have those in good condition.

Crown has allocated R15.3m for environmental rehabilitation in the 2007 financial year. It’s a company only as strong as its people and their skills base,” says a group briefing session held for the ERPM learners on 8 August.

“Talent is the key to our future. In the six months ending June 2006, Crown managed to retain 97% of the mining and five engineering learners who are embarking on their learnership studies. "I would like to wish the very best of luck to all the young people of DRDGOLD SA who are on our learnership programmes.

DRDGOLD SA firmly believes that people are its most important resource. We give you the commitment that we will do our utmost to provide you with an environment where you can develop your skills, and contribute to the company’s objectives while developing your own potential. You have been given a great opportunity, and much will be required of you in return. We expect you to work hard at your studies and to complete your practical assignments. If you do your best to fulfil your responsibility – to yourself, your colleagues and the company – your efforts will be recognised as they deserve.

Times remembered

For a mine that faced closure as recently as 2004, ERPM has a solid present and a bright future. In the six months ending June 2006, ERPM was the best performing operation in DRDGOLD Limited and embarked on an ambitious exploration programme into the adjacent Safico area.

It has been said that in the mirror of our past we may glimpse a vision of our future, and ERPM certainly has a long, illustrious history. ERPM General Manager Manny da Silva looks back on some of the highlights.

“The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 led to the formation of the greatest goldfield the world has ever seen, and ERPM, formed in 1893, has been part of the story almost from the beginning. At its largest, ERPM was made up of 21 mines, with more than 30 vertical and incline shafts. Between 1903 and 1997, ERPM mined 220 million tonnes of reef, producing 1.459 million tonnes of gold.

“RI-Crown led the way in such developments as rockburst control techniques, longwall mining, and ventilation and cooling systems. The first gold metallurgical laboratory was opened here in 1903, and the first underground refrigeration plant was commissioned at Hercules Shaft in 1936. Miners were obviously tough in the old days; a new, lighter rock drill was introduced in 1912 – weighing 82kg!

“RI-Crown has always been a feature of ERPM; one GM held office for 21 years and we have had many fathers and sons working here at the same time – in fact, for many years one family was represented here by four generations.”
In the short time - 10 years – that the legal restrictions on women working underground have been lifted, a quiet revolution has taken place. Women are now an integral part of the workplace, from entry level to senior management, in formerly male-dominated disciplines such as geology.

M mamokhobo Sito of ERPM is typical of the ambitious young people entering the profession. “My dad wanted me to study mechanical engineering, but I wanted to understand the structure of the earth and rocks that make up the world, she says. A government bursary helped her to embark on a National Diploma in Geology through the University of Johannesburg. She is working at ERPM to complete the six-month practical experience requirement of the course. Geologist Nomadlozi Khamumble, also at ERPM, is a few steps higher up the career ladder. After graduating from Wits with a BSc (Geology) in 2002, she joined Harmony Gold Mining’s Driefskraal mine, near Carletonville, before moving to ERPM in 2004. “I love discovering new things,” she says “and every ore body is unique.” Both Collie Russouw and Nomadlozi report some initial resistance from male colleagues, particularly when working underground. “As long as there is mutual respect, and you understand each other’s roles, you will be fine,” says Nomadlozi firmly. At Blyvoor, geologist Lerato Lebethe has notched up five years’ experience (at Harmony and Gold Fields), since obtaining her National Diploma at the Tshwane University of Technology (formerly the Pretoria Technikon). She joined Blyvoor on 1 August, Natalie Orendaal, Blyvoor’s Chief Geologist, who was appointed to her current position in December 2005, has nearly 10 years’ experience with the DRDGOLD group, spanning exploration and production geology.

Her experience before that included a spell at Western Areas. Natalie cites the need to achieve demanding targets with limited resources as one of the most challenging aspects of her current role. “Blyvoor is also challenging from a geological perspective, as we mine a lot of old areas, particularly in Number 4 Shaft which re-opened in 2005. We’re mining some very small blocks, and accurate planning is essential to avoid waste.”