



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

# PROJECT KU-RIHA\*

DEALING WITH  
OCCUPATIONAL LUNG DISEASE:  
A COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE BY SA MINING COMPANIES



**As initially announced in November 2014, eight companies currently or historically in the gold mining industry have committed to seeking a comprehensive solution to the compensation and medical-care issues related to occupational lung disease. They are seeking a solution that is both fair to past, present and future employees, and sustainable to the companies concerned and the mining industry.**

**To this end, the companies have begun discussions with relevant government ministries and departments, organised labour, legal representatives of claimants and other mining companies.**

## CO-OPERATION WITH THE MBOD AND CCOD

The Medical Bureau for Occupational Diseases (MBOD) and Compensation Commissioner for Occupational Diseases (CCOD) are the two institutions through which the occupational lung disease compensation system for miners under the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act (ODMWA) is run.

For the eight companies, an efficiently operating compensation system is a critical part of the comprehensive solution they are seeking, and a priority for the Compensation Commissioner. All

\* Ku-Riha is the Tsonga word for compensation

parties recognise that the compensation system has not been operating as effectively as it should, with significant backlogs in claims processing having built up over the years.

This recognition has prompted co-operation between the companies, the MBOD and the CCOD, building on work already done between the latter and the Chamber of Mines. The first two Department of Health One-Stop Service Centres, in Carletonville and Mthatha, are the fruit of this partnership.

## PROJECT KU-RIHA: A CRITICAL STEP IN THE JOURNEY

Project Ku-Riha is being rolled out by the Department of Health, with the goal of making substantial inroads into eliminating the backlog of claims, ensuring that new claimants with valid claims are paid their due compensation.

This marks a turnaround in the administration and operation of the compensation fund on which mine workers who have contracted occupational diseases depend.

The eight mining companies have committed to a R5 million funding programme which has enabled the MBOD/CCOD to employ a project manager and a further 18 financial and government administration graduate professionals to carry out the necessary work. Among other things, the work of Project Ku-Riha includes:

- Data capturing and verification: confirming the contents of the files and capturing the most important information in each on an electronic database. Accurate data is critical for the claim to be processed and compensated.
- Dealing with certification backlogs.
- Project management.
- Financial assistance to the Carletonville One-Stop Service Centre.



*The One-Stop Service Centres highlight what this collaboration is doing to address legacy issues*

### **BUILDING ON THE SUCCESS OF THE ONE-STOP SERVICE CENTRE**

The Department of Health, in collaboration with the MBOD and mining companies, recently opened One-Stop Service Centres in Carletonville, Gauteng, and Mthatha, Eastern Cape. These One-Stop Centres are designed to provide medical support to ex-mine workers, who often cease receiving treatment when they leave employment. As such, the Centres are located in a mining area – Carletonville – as well as a labour-sending area – Mthatha – to try to provide services to the maximum amount of people.

These clinics offer medical examinations, rehabilitation assessment, health promotion and counselling to all patients, as well as referrals to other medical specialists if necessary. These services mean that patients can be diagnosed, be treated and receive the help they need to remain healthy, in one place. In addition, the Centres help individuals prepare and submit claims to the MBOD for compensation. The Carletonville Centre, which is fully integrated with the Carletonville Hospital, also recently began offering transport to patients and has begun tracing ex-mine workers in other areas to help them find treatment close to their homes. On average the Centre in Carletonville sees 80-90 patients a week, while Mthatha sees around 150.

These Centres highlight what this collaboration is doing to address legacy issues, and work is underway to extend the reach of these in the future.

The Department of Health plans to build two additional Centres in other mining and labour-sending areas in the next year.

### **OCCUPATIONAL LUNG DISEASE AND GOLD MINING**

Occupational lung disease refers to pulmonary disorders associated with exposure to certain substances, such as dust or gases, in the workplace.

In the gold mining sector silicosis is the most common occupational lung disease and has challenged the industry since its inception. The presence of silica dust in gold ore bodies is the primary reason for this.

### **COMPENSATION**

South Africa has two legal systems for the payment of compensation for occupational diseases. They are the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993 (COIDA) and the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act, 1973 (ODMWA). Both are funded by employer premiums.

- ODMWA applies to occupational lung disease on so-called controlled mines. Controlled mines are mines that are declared controlled by the Minister of Health due to the presence of dust, gases, vapours or fumes that could be harmful to an employee's health, leading to a compensable disease. The compensation system provides employees with lump sum benefits according to a predetermined formula. ODMWA is administered by the Department of Health through the MBOD and CCOD.
- COIDA provides a monthly pension, which is dependent on the percentage of permanent disability, to workers who suffer injury in the workplace – all workplaces, and to those who are affected by occupational diseases other than on controlled mines. The benefit is based on the employee's monthly earnings, with a minimum and a maximum level, with variation for dependants. COIDA is administered by the Department of Labour.