

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Occupational Health and Safety Act (No. 85 of 1993)

**Summary:** To provide for the health and safety of persons at work and for the health and safety of persons in connection with the use of plant and machinery; the protection of persons other than persons at work against hazards to health and safety arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work; to establish an advisory council for occupational health and safety; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

Occupational Health is the responsibility and duty of the employer, providing a strong incentive to establish an occupational health management system in every organisation. Occupational Health (OH) management is about improving workplace conditions and eliminating illness and disability related to work. It is the management of risk, the reduction in business losses and an increase in ability to meet business objectives and strengthen stakeholder confidence through systematic and structured technical and management programmes. In the mining industry, it is particularly important that OH management is not only prepared for routine issues in stable conditions but also for the challenges of change management. Both internal changes (e.g. new processes, staffing, working procedures) and external changes (mergers, legislation, technology) can impact on physical and psychosocial wellbeing of employees.

Many organisations have adopted a risk-based approach to establishing internal organisational controls, and regular review and public reporting systems have been established. Legislation has moved from a reactive and prescriptive, rule-based approach towards a proactive focus; the level of occupational risk that is regarded as intolerable has been lowered; and specific actions to manage workplace risks have to be instituted and sustained to meet worker and stakeholder expectations.

Although external factors pressure for improvement, the reduction or elimination of workplace risk, disease and disability mainly depends on factors where risk is managed at operational level, namely:

- Technical programmes that identify and address specific hazards
- Behavioural programmes that create commitment, collaboration, competence and conformance;  
and
- Management systems that support and promote the process

There is no one perfect management system to suit all organisations. However, good OH management is recognisable and should be an integral part of every organisation, not just an exercise in meeting regulatory requirements. It will not be achieved without leadership, commitment, simple processes, ongoing involvement of all stakeholders and consistent and comprehensive communication throughout organisations.