



Ambrose Mokgalagadi, fatigue centre nurse, is testing the Kumba Iron Ore's fatigue management system. The system combines human fatigue risk prediction software and alertness technologies to predict the risk of fatigue and monitor employee fatigue in real-time.

Photo: Philip Mostert

Mine takes health, safety up a notch

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work is celebrated on 28 April and for Anglo American's iron ore business unit, Kumba Iron Ore, this day marks a significant milestone: 1 083 days since the company's last fatal accident.

There is little cause for celebration though.

When it comes to safety, Kumba believes that there is no room for complacency.

Themba Mkhwanazi, Kumba's chief executive officer, launched a "sacred covenant code" in 2016 and declared that not one more person would lose their lives while working for Kumba.

It was no small commitment, considering the scope of Kumba's operations, Sishen mine, and at the Kolomela mine which employs 3 800 miners that are exposed to the elements during their work shifts to enable the mine to operate 24/7.

Since embedding a company-wide culture of zero harm and elimination of fatalities programme, as well as taking a holistic approach to health and safety at its operations, Kumba has been without a fatal incident since May 2016.

In addition, it has seen a 67% drop in serious incidents and injuries across its Sishen, Kolomela and Saldanha Port operations.

Philip Fourie, head of Safety and Health at Kumba, says fatalities do not have to be an inevitable by-product of mining.

"If we can work one day with zero harm, then we can do two, four, 100 and more. We know the fatal risks facing us, and we need to manage them properly."

This fresh approach to safety has seen a fundamental change in mindset from mine leadership and every single employee, that includes a relentless focus on managing catastrophic and fatal risks, and a commitment to ensuring the health and wellness of all miners, their families and the broader community.

Safety results now form part of employee key performance indicators (KPIs), and as such, affect their bonuses.

"We all play a role in preventing accidents and injuries. So, we set out sacred covenant rules that if you break them, you will lose your job. Preserving lives of our employees is key for us," says Fourie.

Managers at all levels have

been challenged to change their mindsets around safety, and to understand that whatever happens on their watch reflects their leadership.

"If you're going to eliminate accidents and incidents, leaders must be in the field where the risk work is taking place. When workers see this, they tend to follow correct procedures more.

"This has had a major impact on our accident rates," says Fourie.

Kumba has gone to unprecedented lengths to ensure its safety culture is embedded and enforced – including costly site shut-downs, where necessary, to rectify hazards and modify high-risk processes and behaviours.

On the one hand, the company has introduced a raft of new technologies and innovation to reduce exposure to occupational hazards that pose risk of injury and disease.

There is also a state-of-the-art fatigue management system, which combines human fatigue risk prediction software and alertness technologies to predict the risk of fatigue and monitor employee fatigue in real-time.

Supervisors can then take immediate action, which includes sending employees to the mine's fatigue centre for evaluation and a break.

This is followed closely by creating a culture of safety and caring at the mines. The occupational health of the entire workforce has also come under close scrutiny, says Bongani Nene, who heads up Health and Occupational Safety at Kumba.

Kumba's health approach is to ensure employees come in healthy and remain healthy.

"We reduce the chronic disease burden, ensure mental health, manage HIV and TB in contractors and dependents, even manage obesity," says Nene.

To this end, Kumba's clinic near Kolomela has been running for the past 12 years to treat lifestyle diseases and maintain the broader health of the community.

"Ensuring our workers are safe is just one part of the equation. We also consider the impact of the working environment on workers, their families, and the communities that depend upon them. Healthy communities support healthy workforces" says Nene