

## Silicosis Elimination Programme Launch

Released by Department of Labour on 28 June 2004

Labour Minister, Membathisi Mdladlana has appealed to employers, workers and occupational health professionals to combat the deadly Silicosis disease.

Speaking during the launch of the national programme for the elimination of Silicosis in Johannesburg today, Minister Mdladlana said Silicosis impacted negatively on development, and placed strain on the Compensation Fund and the public health system.

Silicosis is a disabling, non-reversible and a fatal lung disease caused by the inhalation of dust containing respirable Crystalline Silica - which is a component of sand and rock.

The Minister's launch intended to ensure that working conditions are improved, and that the burden of occupational diseases is also reduced. "State agencies such as labour and mine inspectors need to be able to identify dusty workplaces by inspection and measurement," the Minister said.

"Inspectors should also suggest practical solutions and have sufficient confidence to take any appropriate action against persistent offenders including recommending prosecution," the Minister said.

"Just as we fought tooth and nail to depose apartheid, this government is determined to embark on the new struggle to eliminate poor safety conditions at the workplace and free our workers from the death traps of hazardous working environments with the same vigour and spirit," the Minister said.

The Minister added that employers need to systematically assess the workplace to see whether there is any exposure to Silica dust and devise means to prevent risks, and should also seek professional advice.

He also emphasised that the level of training of the workforce must be improved and employers must be seen to be favoring work practices that are known to reduce or eliminate risk. "Workers on the other hand need to practice what they have been trained to do," he said.

Minister Mdladlana also announced that a working group has been established to develop a programme and to support the implementation of plans aimed at eliminating Silicosis.

The International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation has set 2030 as the date by which this preventable occupational disease must be eliminated.

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