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PROGRAMME FOR THE ELIMINATION OF SILICOSIS - SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Silicosis is a disabling, nonreversible and sometimes fatal lung disease caused by the inhalation of dust containing respirable crystalline silica, resulting in the formation of scar tissue in the lung, which reduces the lung's ability to extract oxygen from the air we breathe.

Inhaled crystalline silica from occupational sources is classified as a group 1 human lung carcinogen (causing lung cancer). A frequent cause of death in people with silicosis is pulmonary tuberculosis (silico-tuberculosis). Respiratory insufficiencies due to massive fibrosis and emphysema as well as heart failure are other causes of death.

In South Africa the National Working Group "NWG" for the Elimination of Silicosis was established in 2003 with a mandate to eliminate silicosis in line with the initiatives of the International Labour Organization "ILO." So far the NWG developed the following:

1. National Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis "NPES" based on the ten points provided by ILO;
2. Information brochures on silicosis;
3. Posters on silicosis.

They then organized the launching of that NPES by the Minister of Labour last year (28 June 2004). Since then the NWG has been busy establishing the provincial Working Groups "PWGs" who will be responsible for implementing the provisions of the NPES in their respective provinces. The major function of the PWG is to compile a provincial profile and send it to the NWG which will consolidate all the 10 provincial profiles to come up with one country profile which will serve as a baseline and give us an indication as to where did we start.

Education and training remains the main focus of the NWG and that is why annually we will organize a workshop that will not only give both the NWG and the PWG to report on their achievements but also to be empowered by people who are very knowledgeable on this matter. The PWG will also annually organize awareness campaigns with a view to making the employers, employees and the general public aware of the danger of exposure to Silica dust.

Keywords: silicosis, crystalline silica, eliminate silicosis, launched NPES, provincial profile and awareness campaigns.