

DMR: Statement by the Department of Mineral Resources on acid mine drainage and derelict mines

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The Department of Mineral Resources has assured Parliament that government will soon agree on solutions to deal with problems posed by Ownerless and Derelict (O&D) Mines as well as Acid Mine Drainage (AMD).

The Director-General of the DMR, Adv. Sandile Nogxina, today (Wedn) told the Portfolio Committee on Mining that all relevant government departments are working together to ensure that viable and sustainable solutions are agreed upon.

"There has, in the past, been a problem with Departments working in silos with respect to the challenges posed by Acid Mine Drainage. There is a lot of information residing in the various government departments, science institutions and universities, but it is not coordinated and that is partly why we find that there are so many different approaches to the problems of Acid Mine Drainage," said Adv. Nogxina.

"We are now working together to find sustainable solutions to the challenges posed by Acid Mine Drainage. We will not allow the situation to get out of hand; it will not reach crisis proportions. The scientific work that is being done is already at an advanced stage," he said, emphasizing that government's scientists had been working hard to find solutions over a long period already. Government has established an Inter-Ministerial Committee, co-chaired by the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs and the Minister of Mineral Resources. The Committee, which met two weeks ago, also includes the Ministers of Energy, Finance, Planning and Science and Technology. Officials from the Department of Mineral Resources and the Department of Water Affairs, as well as scientists from the the Council for Geoscience, Mintek and CSIR and Water Research Commission, were given six weeks by the Inter-Ministerial Committee to produce a coordinated plan to deal with the challenges posed by Acid Mine Drainage.

"Government and its scientific institutions have formed a technical committee and are working in tandem to produce a report which will table a coordinated plan to deal with Acid Mine Drainage at the next meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Committee," said Adv. Nogxina.

On the issue of Ownerless and Derelict Mines, Nogxina presented to the Portfolio Committee a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate those mines which posed health and safety risks to communities.

"It is important to note that mining has been taking place in South Africa for more than a century and we are now having to deal with the legacy of this mining," said Adv. Nogxina.

Following extensive research, the Department now has a comprehensive database of Ownerless and Derelict Mines, allowing for systematic management of the problem. The Department's short- to medium-term plan will focus on those Ownerless and Derelict Mines which pose an immediate threat to communities. These include asbestos sites as well as open mines. A total of 48 asbestos mines in the Northern Cape and Limpopo have already been rehabilitated since 1994, whilst 108 dangerous gold mine trenches and shafts have been rehabilitated over the same period. In the medium- to long-term, the Department would be rolling out a plan to rehabilitate as many of the 6000 Ownerless and Derelict Mines as possible, depending on the availability of financial resources. The estimated cost for the 10-year rehabilitation plan was R1.456-billion, excluding inflation, for which the Department does not have funding. Those abandoned mines whose owners can be traced will be held responsible in terms of the law.

"We will be hosting a summit in the next two months or so to bring all relevant role-players together so that, collectively, we find ways to deal with the challenges posed by Ownerless and Derelict Mines," said Adv. Nogxina.

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