



Reviving a safety culture at Obuasi

"Safety is a journey and not a destination, and is the responsibility of all, workers and management," said managing director Danie Spies, speaking at a recent operational safety day celebration at Obuasi mine in Ghana. Instituted at the end of 2005, these safety days have become a regular feature of the mine's calendar, as part of a major intervention that led to a marked improvement in performance during 2006.

Obuasi is one of the oldest operating underground mines in the world, with underground workings at an average depth of 1,500 metres. The mine, which employs some 8,400 employees, operates three gold processing plants, and produced 390,000 ounces of gold in 2006.

"Major strides have been made in the past two years in improving the mine's safety infrastructure, which had suffered from a lack of available capital in earlier years," says Danie Spies, who was appointed managing director of the mine in March 2005. "A 15MW refrigeration plant and 300m³/s surface fan were installed and commissioned during 2006."

The other major innovation has been the insistence that safety is a line responsibility, rather than a specialised occupational health and safety function. "In the past, there was no senior management review of dressing cases, for example," says Spies. "The prevailing perception was that once employees had been trained in safety procedures, they were responsible for applying them."

Spies is a firm believer that behaviour is the critical component in safety. "Safety is a state of mind, and an integral part of production: there is no question of trading one off against the other," he says. "Senior management here strives to make AngloGold Ashanti's value system an integral part of daily life: every person has the right to a healthy retirement and quality work goes hand in hand with safety."

The fall of ground management strategy used in the company's South African operations has now been implemented at Obuasi (*see case study on: A new strategy for managing falls of ground in South Africa at www.aga-reports.com/06/FOGM.htm*). The risk management system is being implemented, with 200 employees – considered to be critical mass – trained and certificated in hazard identification and issue risk management during 2006. A programme to train the entire workforce in risk assessment will begin in 2007 and is scheduled for completion within five years.

The success of these sustained interventions is evident in improved safety results. The dressing cases rate improved from 13.35 in 2005 to 5.19 in 2006. Lost time injury frequency rates, after a period of regression, are showing an improvement. The mine recorded 2 million fatality-free shifts in 2006, as well as 101 days without a fall of ground injury and 34 days without a lost time injury. Fog injuries reduced from 16 in 2005 to four in 2006.

An accident review process was implemented during 2006. All accidents, with the injured employee and his line managers in attendance, are reviewed within 24 hours. Review sessions are chaired by the managing director. Spies comments that organised labour is fully involved in, and supportive of, the various safety initiatives implemented over the last two years.

During the year, Obuasi achieved ISO 14001 certification in respect of environmental management. Training to achieve OHSAS 18001 certification in respect of health and safety (*see case study: From NOSA to OHSAS at www.aga-reports.com/06/OHSAS.htm*) started in January 2007, and is expected to be complete by the year end.

