



# “Safety and Health in the Mining Industry: The Perspective of the Ministry of Labour”

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# 1. Introduction

The safety and health of workers in the Mining Industry is a matter of grave concern for the Ministry of Labour.

It is our view that when workers leave their homes to go to work there is the expectation of their families that they will return home safely at the end of the work-day or work period.

This is not always the situation particularly in the Gold Mining Sector of the Mining Industry. While efforts have been made to address this situation it is quite obvious that much more needs to be done.

# 1. Introduction Cont'd

- \* Mining is ranked in the top three most hazardous industries due to its high risk activities and processes. It presents a great risk to work and holds the highest share of work-related fatalities/ fatal injuries.
- \* However, Our main focus today will be on the safety and health of the Artisanal Small-Scale Gold Mining (ASGM) Sector.

## 2. Occupational Safety and Health Department

- \* The Department has as its mission to improve working conditions and environment in Guyana with the emphasis on prevention rather than cure.
- \* It is charged with responsibility of monitoring, encouraging and enforcing the practice of good safety and health standards at work.
- \* It provides information, advisory, supervisory and regulatory services to assist employers, workers and trade unions in the recognition and control of workplace hazards/stresses.
- \* The activities include the inspection of workplaces, investigation of workplace accidents and complaints and creating awareness of good workplace safety and health practices. We also take employers to court for breaches of laws.
- \* Its legal authority is derived from the Occupational Safety and Health Act No. 32 of 1997 or Cap 99:06, Laws of Guyana and the regulations made there under.

# 3. Key OSH Concerns about the Mining Sector

## 3.1 Non/under Reporting of Occupational Accidents:

- \* Occupational Accident – an unplanned event that results in injury, ill health or damage to property
  - \* Occupational Disease illness- work related disease illness e.g. Mercury poisoning, Silicosis.
- While notices of accidents are received from large scale mining operations, none is received from the ASGM Sector.

3.2 **Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions e.g.** Unguarded machinery and equipment, absence of Personal Protective equipment.

# 3. Key OSH Concerns about the Mining Sector

## 3.3 Accidents and Occupational Diseases Reporting: Legal OSH Requirements.

- \* Section 69 (1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Chapter 99:06, makes provision for the reporting of all workplace accidents that require a worker to be away from work for one day or more within four days. The report is to be submitted in a form described as the First Schedule to the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Authority.
- \* There is also a reporting requirement when a worker returns to work after recovery from an injury. The report is required to be submitted to the OSH Authority in a format described as the second schedule.
- \* The accident is also required to be recorded in an accident register which is to be kept by the employer.

# 3. Key OSH Concerns about the Mining Sector Cont'd

## 3.3 Accidents and Occupational Diseases Reporting: Legal OSH Requirements. Cont'd

- \* **Fatal accidents are required to be reported forthwith to the Authority**
- \* A failure to report the accident can result in legal actions being instituted against the defaulter and if found guilty in a Court of Law can attract a Penalty for Non Reporting of Accidents- Fine (\$10,000.00- \$ 50,000.00) and three (3) months imprisonment
- \* In the case of **Occupational Diseases** reports are to be made by Medical Practitioner and Employer in the form described as the Third Schedule
- \* Penalty for Non -Reporting of Occupational Disease (Medical Practitioner) Fine - \$10, 000-\$ 30,000



# 3. Key OSH Concerns about the Mining Sector Cont'd

## 3.4 Fatalities in the Mining Industry 2019-2021

\* Over the past three years our reports have indicated the following statistics in the mining sector.

**Mining Fatalities 2019-2021**

Year	Tree Fall	Pit Wall	Under-ground	Equipment	Drowning	Crushed	Vehicular accident	Other	Total #of Fatalities
2019	1	2	-	-	-	-	2	3	8
2020	3	6	1	1	1	2	-	-	14
2021	4	2	-	1	1	-	4	-	12
<b>Total</b>	8	10	1	2	2	2	6	3	34

# 3. Key OSH Concerns about the Mining Sector Cont'd

## 3.4 Fatalities in the Mining Industry 2019-2021 cont'd

- \* Over the past three years the OSH Department statistics have indicated that there were thirty-four fatalities in the Mining Sector.
- \* Fifty-three (53) % of the accidents were caused by Tree Fall incidents and Pit wall collapses.
- \* With the exception of one fatality the other fatalities were in the ASGM Sector.
- \* For the first seven months of this year, we have recorded seven fatalities in Mining and they were all in the ASGM Sector.
- \* They were as follows, Region# 1-2, Region# 7-3, Region # 8-2.

# 4. Other Legal OSH Requirements

## Registration of Industrial Establishments (Part 11 of the OSH ACT) & Responsibilities/ Duties of Employers (Section 46-47) the OSH Act.

- \* Every Industrial Establishment is required to be registered.
- \* Sections 46-47 set out the duties and responsibilities of employers for the safety and health of the workers that they employ.
- \* For example Employers are required to take every precaution reasonable for the protection of workers.
- \* Subject to such age as may be prescribed, not knowingly permit a person to be in or about a workplace who is under such age as the age of completion of compulsory schooling, and in any case fourteen years.
- \* (The age has since been changed to 15)



# Other OSH Legal Requirements

- \* Take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker
  - \* Post in the workplace, a copy of this Act and any explanatory material prepared by the Authority outlining the rights, responsibilities and duties of workers
  - \* Prepare and review at least annually, a written OSH policy
  - \* Post at a conspicuous location in the workplace a copy of the OSH Policy
  - \* Provide and maintain, a safe, sound, healthy and secure working environment as far as is reasonably practicable
  - \* Ensure that the workplace, machinery, equipment and processes under his control are safe and without risk to safety and health as far as is reasonably practicable
- n.b.** reasonably practicable involves weighing a risk against the trouble, time and money needed to control it.



# 5. Safety and Health in ASGM

- \* Despite ASGM being a common economic activity, its casual nature of operation has often led to neglecting good OSH practices, thus making it a source of accidents that result in injuries.
- \* Other than the casual nature of its operations workers engaging in ASGM have been reported to be lacking in skills, training, knowledge and with limited resources to enable them to practice the trade safely.
- \* The physical conditions accompanied process and actions are hazardous and are a concern for work related injuries.
- \* According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) miners in ASGM are 6-7 times more likely than large-scale miners to sustain injuries. As such, miners in ASGM have a 90 fold greater workplace rate of death than large-scale miners in developing countries

# 5. Safety and Health in ASGM

## \* Key Hazards and Risks in ASGM

- \* The biggest health risks are exposure to dust (silica dust causes silicosis, particularly in gold miners), mercury and other chemicals which may be used.

## **Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions:**

- \* pit wall failures
- \* excessive noise and vibration
- \* poor ventilation (heat, humidity) and overexertion
- \* inadequate work space
- \* The incorrect use of equipment which may not be fit for purpose.



# 5. Safety and Health in ASGM

Other commonplace health issues include:

- \* poor sanitation and lack of clean water
- \* malaria, typhoid, dysentery
- \* malnutrition
- \* substance abuse
- \* Sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), including the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) that can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)



# 6. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM

There no doubt that there is a need to improve safety and health in the ASGM sector and this needs to be addressed now. There are at least two approaches that we can adopt almost immediately.



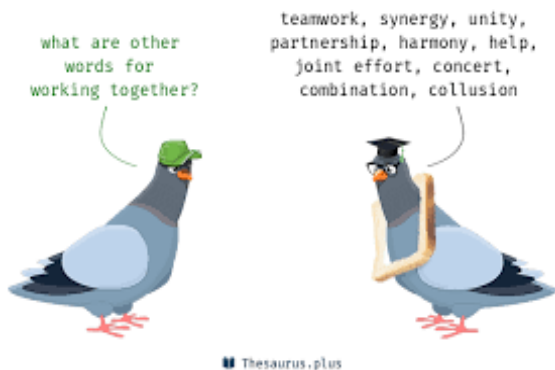


# 6. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM

## 6.1 The Building/Strengthening of Partnerships

The ASGM Sector is a substantial source of income for many people/families. There is need to formalize collaborations and partnerships with members from key sectors/stakeholders.

The primary role of such a collaboration/partnership is to provide a forum to develop, lead and implement strategies and develop plans for the improvement of safety and health within the ASGM sector.



let's  
WORK  
Together!



# 6. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM Cont'd

## \* 6.2 The employment of the Risk Management/Assessment Approach:

- \* There is need for a clear understanding of the risks associated with working in this sector. And this understanding can best be achieved through a consistent and ongoing risk assessment process.
- \* A comprehensive Mining Sector Risk Management Assessment process can be conducted collaboratively with the workplace parties and key stakeholders.



# 6. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM Cont'd

- \* 6.2 The employment of the Risk Management/Assessment Approach :
- \* Regular risk assessments will surely help to focus attention on the hazards that pose the greatest risk to safety and health and will also ensure that the sector is able to identify new or evolving hazards and take steps to mitigate them.



Source: NIOSH

# 6. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM Cont'd

## 6.3 Possible Outcomes

The Outcomes of such approaches can lead to the following:

- \* Assessment of the level of adherence operational OSH practices, management system that exist in ASGM sector
- \* The conduct of Comprehensive ASGM Mining Sector Risk Assessment process.
- \* Structured and coherent Risk management strategy, plans and programmes to address risks and improve OSH in ASGM
- \* Development of a practical Risk Management Framework that can be applied in the ASGM sector
- \* Provide a practical framework for mine managers, employees and other stakeholders to improve the management of OSH risk within ASGM



# 7. Improving Safety and Health in ASGM

## Cont'd

### 7.3 Possible Outcomes cont'd

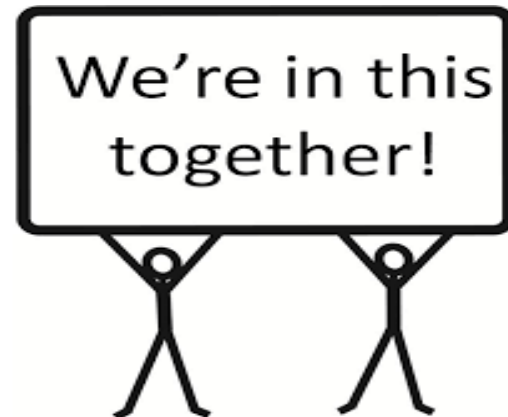
- \* Inspectors using a risk based approach to ensure that the most significant risks are effectively managed
- \* The development of a Risk- Based Safety Culture- (This is where two separate components of risk assessment and risk management form the basis for the development of the safety and health culture in ASGM)
- \* High level of compliance with relevant laws and regulations, standards.
- \* Substantial reduction of fatalities, serious accidents, dangerous occurrences, diseases/illnesses in ASGM while at the same time making profit.



# 7. Conclusion

Safety and Health at work is everybody's business and we at the Ministry of Labour, The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, The Mining Associations, Representatives of Mining communities, employers and workers in the sector all need to work together in a pro-active way to improve the working conditions and environment for workers in the ASGM Sector so that at the end of the work day or work period they can return home safely to their families. We owe it to them.

Alone we can  
do so little;  
together we can  
do so much.





**END**

**Any Questions?**