



GRAVES AND MEMORIALS

FACT SHEET 2017

The positive impacts of the mining industry in South Africa – which are many and undisputed – do not prevent the industry from acknowledging its past, including the negative impacts it has had on the country and on its people.

It is a sad and unfortunate reality of the South African mining industry that – over the past 150 years, over 80 000 mineworkers have died and more than a million have been seriously injured at work. Safety performance has improved significantly, particularly over the past two decades. Nonetheless, since 1994, 5 302 people have died as a result of mine-related accidents.

In many cases many lives were lost in massive accidents. In other cases, single individuals lost their lives as they worked. While the industry, and indeed the country, has recognised the names and details of those who lost their lives in disasters, in the past the names of every individual who passed away in such incidents might not always have been recognised.

But we know that they were bread winners, heads of families, youngsters excited to make a contribution to their families for the first time, people with ambitious plans for the future, and hopes for retirement back home. They would have come from across South Africa and from the sub-continent. Some may have come willingly to the mines, but many more would have felt they had no other option. We know that they were, each and every one of them, precious and beloved.



South African mining-related tragedies

22 January 1960	Coalbrook	A massive underground collapse occurred at the Coalbrook Clydesdale colliery located near what is today Sasolburg. Rescue workers were unable to reach the trapped miners, and ultimately 435 men died.
10 May 1995	Vaal Reefs	The tragedy occurred when an underground locomotive crashed through a barrier into the shaft at a level of 1,700 metres below surface, falling on to a conveyance that was transporting 104 mineworkers underground. All were killed.
13 May 1993	Middelbult	A methane gas explosion occurred 130 metres below the surface at Sasol Mining's Middelbult coal mine in Secunda, starting an underground fire that left 53 mineworkers dead and seven injured.
12 to 16 August 2012	Marikana	Violence triggered by escalating labour unrest at Lonmin's Marikana mine resulted in the death of 44 people between 12 and 16 August 2012 in what has come to be known as the Marikana tragedy.
31 August 1987	St Helena	A methane gas explosion at the St Helena gold mine in Welkom caused a mine elevator to plunge 1.4km to the bottom of the mine shaft, claiming the lives of 62 people.
16 September 1986	Kinross	The use of an acetylene torch sparked flames that spread rapidly through mine workings, igniting plastic insulation on wiring and polyurethane foam sprayed on sidewalls and hangingwalls to keep them dry. Polyurethane foam contains a sealant that emits toxic and dangerous fumes when it burns, and most of the 177 miners who passed away succumbed to the toxic fumes.
22 November 1996	Rovic	A mudslide occurred 1 000m underground at the Rovic Diamond Mine (between Boshof and Dealsville in the Free State), claiming the lives of 20 people.

It is also an extremely unfortunate reality that sometimes in the past these deceased mineworkers were not accorded the respect they were entitled to, and that their families did not receive the support which should have been offered to them.

Since the 1920s, there has been a protocol in place at the Chamber of Mines and among its members that provided for the burial of employees who died while working in the mining industry near their place of work, or for the repatriation of their remains. This protocol included engagement with the family, and consultation on their wishes. We are not proud of previous practices where families opted for financial compensation instead of the repatriation of remains which the industry did not challenge.

Burials near mines would typically have taken place within the jurisdictions of local municipalities and those graveyards would have been used for all community members – not only for miners. We cannot say with certainty that these protocols were always adhered to, particularly when family members could not be located.

Different mining companies have also had different approaches to commemorating accidents and incidents, including memorials and memorial services, and the establishment of education funds, such as the Vaal Reefs Disaster Trust Fund.

Today we are confident that the family of a mineworker who is fatally injured at work will receive support from the company (including burial and repatriation costs). The process includes families being brought to the mine, where memorial services are held. The deceased are transported home, according to family wishes. The companies ensure that the families are provided with assistance on pension and provident payouts.



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