



Strategy towards a mining industry-wide Buy-and-Maintain Quiet initiative to reduce noise induced hearing loss

by H. Gumede*, K. Blomerus*, D. Coutts†, and J. DeBeer‡

Synopsis

The challenges of noise emission in the mining industry are well known. These challenges are exacerbated by the increasing trend towards mechanized mining, and there is general consensus that an effective industry-wide Buy Quiet initiative (BQI) will significantly assist in reducing noise-induced hearing loss by minimizing noise at its source.

In its endeavours to improve the health of workers, the MOSH Noise Team has facilitated development of a proposed strategy and structure for a BQI. Extensive consultation with stakeholders resulted in support for the initiative. The MOSH Noise Team was advised to solicit the contributions of consulting mechanical and electrical engineers (CM&EEs), whose support is viewed as critical for realization of the initiative, since elimination of noise at source is an engineering challenge, and most procurement standards and specifications are set and managed by engineers.

A workshop with CM&EEs and their representatives, as well as group environmental engineers (GEEs), confirmed the urgent need for the initiative and provided valuable insights. The workshop used obstacle-based planning techniques to identify the factors on which the success of this BQI will depend.

Most potential obstacles to the implementation revolved around proper scoping, leadership commitment, and companies' adherence to the initiative. Lack of involvement by the relevant stakeholders and economic issues were also identified as potential obstacles.

Delegates at the workshop felt that the successful implementation of the industry-wide BQI, will depend on the mining industry addressing the specific obstacles. The most critical and urgent issue was identified as the formation of a properly constituted industry-wide BQI task team that includes representatives from critical stakeholder groups and which is mandated and empowered to drive the initiative.

Keywords

occupational safety and health, noise-induced hearing loss, noise reduction, Buy Quiet initiative.

Introduction

The mining industry's zero harm vision and 2013 health and safety milestones demonstrate the commitment that mining companies have made towards elimination of noise hazards in the workplace. There is a general consensus that the challenge requires more than a willing and able occupational health practitioner supported by personalized PPE, and that the industry will have to focus most of its energies on the elimination of noise at source. This is no simple and easy task, and will require leadership involvement across the industry in addressing noise hazards.

The CoM MOSH Learning Hub Noise Team has been promoting an industry-wide Buy Quiet initiative (BQI). In the last decade, individual mining companies have established Buy Quiet policies, albeit with limited success. Unless industry partners with and motivates suppliers to invest specifically in the development of quieter equipment, efforts to eliminate noise hazards will remain reactive. It has now become imperative for the mining industry to embrace the challenge and develop an industry-wide BQI that will create a 'step change' in noise management and reduction.

Various critical stakeholders, including the Learning Hub, group environmental engineers (GEEs), the MOSH Task Team, mine professional associations (MPAs), independent consultants, the MOSH Noise Team sponsor, and consulting mechanical and electrical engineers (CM&EEs) have been consulted regarding this initiative, and all confirmed the need for it and pledged support. It is widely believed that the CM&EEs is the critical industry group in this initiative, because noise elimination at source is largely an engineering function and most procurement standards fall under the responsibilities of engineers.

An industry-wide Buy Quiet commitment is required, and for it to succeed a firm decision from mining companies to procure only equipment and machinery that complies with specific noise emission standards is essential. The motivation for an industry-wide Buy Quiet commitment is based on the following factors:

- In the last decade, individual mining companies that have established Buy Quiet policies have met with limited success
- While individual Buy Quiet policies from mining companies do help, it is only

* Chamber of Mines (RSA).

† Harmony Gold.

‡ Glencore.

© The Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, 2014. ISSN 2225-6253. Paper received Oct. 2013; revised paper received Apr. 2014.