

**MINING INDUSTRY OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH** 



Methods to improve the **Drill and Blast**  Cycle in Conventional Narrow Tabular Orebodies in South African Mines:

**A Reference Guide**





To ensure mining matters for South Africa.



To play a leadership role in enabling the South African mining sector to achieve its real potential for investment, growth, transformation and development in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.



Members are obliged to conduct their business according to the agreed Minerals Council values, which dictate the minimum standards of conduct required of them in order to become a member of, or remain a member of, the Minerals Council. The five values of the Minerals Council are:





Respect

**Trust** 

Honesty

Accountability

Methods to improve the **Drill and Blast**  Cycle in Conventional Narrow Tabular Orebodies in South African Mines:





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# *We will treat everyone with CARE, DIGNITY AND RESPECT*

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**



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**MINING INDUSTRY OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH** 

*We pledged our commitment to the target of ZERO HARM, and that EVERY MINEWORKER shall return from work UNHARMED, EVERY DAY*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since the inception of formal large-scale mining in South Africa 120 years ago, the most economically feasible, and productive method of extracting the orebody, has been through blasting operations. In order to garner the greatest benefit from the orebody, the process requires that a fair number of steps be completed and repeated frequently to achieve the required targets. This process has not changed much over time despite there being several significant technological advances and improvements in the mining sector. However, in the last decade, the efficiency and productivity of the drill and blast cycle has come under increased scrutiny and it has become apparent that the quality of the drill and blast has a significant impact on both productivity and the stability of the working areas. In addition, and against the backdrop of the persisting high number of fall of ground (FOG) accidents, the Minerals Council South Africa (MCSA), through the established Mining Industry Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) Learning Hub's FOG Team, has sought to identify and document a Drill and Blast (DB) reference guide to address this need, and improve the mining industry through this initiative.

In the past, a Leading Practice (LP) is sourced and documented from a single operation or mining company. In this way, the FOG Team would be able to disseminate into industry an already tried and tested methodology or best practice that has proven to be successful at addressing and mitigating a particular risk. However, in the DB case, the absence of a single provider necessitated the sourcing of information from several mining operations and relevant research subject matter. In addition, with the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, new technology solutions and innovations have also been included in the DB Reference Guide. It is envisaged that the use of a combination of sources will ultimately complement the LP and produce an improved effect on the mining industry.

Embedded, and underlying this document, is the MOSH Leading Practice Adoption System. The system remains one of the primary vehicles to attain the safety goals and milestones that mining industry has set for itself. In this light, the Drill and Blast reference guide is viewed as an industry initiative in the quest for ZERO HARM and, that optimal execution thereof will result in significant safety improvements in the industry, especially in the FOG space. It is also envisaged that a number of FOG leading practices will emanate from this reference guide.



## **2. AIM AND SCOPE OF THE REFERENCE GUIDE**

The primary aim of the work is to describe the Drill and Blast (DB) Reference guide for stoping in conventional narrow tabular mines. However, this does not prevent other mining sectors from using the information to improve their drill and blast processes.

The scope of the document is to:

- Describe the Drill and Blast Reference Guide,
- Provide a value case for such a guide,
- Outline the safety trends underlying drill and blast processes,
- Analyse data, procured from industry, that shows the extent of deviations from the standards, norms and procedures for drill and blast,
- Show why improving drilling and blasting will contribute to both production and safety initiatives,
- Provide techniques on how to improve the processes,
- Define the key elements that constitute an ideal drill and blast cycle,
- Show how efficiency and productivity gains can be made within the cycle, and,
- Provide a suite of available products and technologies that can be used to improve the training of personnel, as well as contribute to efficiencies within the DB cycle.

## **3. BACKGROUND TO THE INITIATIVE: WHY CONSIDER IMPROVING THE DRILL AND BLAST PROCESS?**

### **3.1. SAFETY DRIVERS**

Since the inception of formal large-scale underground mining in South Africa, FOGs have been responsible for significant loss of life, permanent disability and serious injury in the mining industry. In the past, the FOG could have contributed as much as 50%. However, since the inception of the Mine Health and Safety Act (MHSA), the adoption of Leading Practices, and a number of Industry initiatives, the number of fatalities have drastically reduced.

#### **But the FOG problem persists!**

The Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) reported that FOG fatalities contributed 31% of all fatalities in the mining sector in 2015. In 2016, 2017, and 2018, this contribution has steadily increased to 36%, 37% and 27% respectively. In addition, the number of FOG fatalities has also increased. The question therefore begs as to what step change is required to enact a significant reduction of FOG fatalities?

#### The FOG Team is confident that the **DB Reference Guide will bring about such a step change!**

**Figure 1** serves to illustrate the root of the problem…drilling into the hangingwall and detonation of such shot holes in a conventional hard-rock stope. The drilling of and subsequent detonation:

- 1. Imparts energy into the rockmass,
- 2. Opens up pre-existing stress fractures,
- 3. Breaks up competent rock strata,
- 4. Creates brows and caviats,
- 5. Reduces compression of the rockblocks,
- 6. Allows slippage of geological features, extending breaks in the hangingwall, and,
- 7. Ultimately leads to a FOG.

A study conducted in 2015, revealed that during the years 2013-2014, poor drilling and blasting could have contributed to 47% of all the fatal FOG accidents.

**Accurate blasting practices in underground mining environments have been proven to deliver improvements in safety and productivity and should therefore be considered part of the core foundation upon which a mine is developed and operated.** www.miningreview.com



FOG fatalities as a percentage of the total fatalities in the South African Mining Industry (SAMI)





**Figure 1: Poor drilling discipline results in sockets in the hangingwall**

Similarly, a relationship could be found in the analysis of the 2015-2017 FOG fatality database, where barring nonconformances within the DB cycle contributed to 80% of fatal FOG accidents. Barring is related to drill and blast in the following way:

*If holes are not drilled correctly (angle, depth, spacing, burden, etc.), and these holes are detonated, poor hangingwall conditions result. The issue is compounded if the detonation is problematic (sequencing, coupling, tamping, explosive charge). Therefore, if any one of these or a combination of elements are not to standard, the hangingwall becomes susceptible to damage and deterioration. To remedy such "poor ground conditions", created by the process of poor DB, the mining crew has to utilize valuable time and effort to re-create better hangingwall conditions through the process of barring the loose rocks. This further exposes the mining crew to poor hangingwall and uncontrolled failures may result. In this way,*

**The sub-standard act has resulted in a sub-standard condition.**

## **Every person going home from work unharmed everyday**

## **3.2. DATA ACQUISITION**

## **3.2.1. SOURCE MINE DATA**

In 2015, the MOSH Learning Hub conducted on site research at two source mines; one in the gold sector, and another in the platinum sector. Both were conventional tabular operations. Using the 3 legs of a Leading Practice, Technical Data was from underground stope drilling data; Behavioural Communication concerns were highlighted during interviews with mine personnel; and Leadership Behaviour challenges were identified during ad-hoc visits to the mines and through the interview process.

The data provided invaluable information on aspects that may not have daylighted through a normal risk assessment process and it showed that:

- Many of the FOG problems emanate from the creation of poor rockmass and strata conditions. During the extraction process, these conditions are often caused by unfavourable geological structures and/or high stress zones. However, these geological weaknesses, and many other non-problematic **geological conditions are made worse**, and unstable, by the act of mining. In particular, poor drilling and blasting of the rockmass contributes significantly to the instability and the potential for failure.
- The vibrational and explosive effects, within the confined space of a stope is exacerbated, if **incorrect marking, poor drilling, overcharging, incorrect timing and sequencing**, are practiced. The effect can result in degradation of the rockmass, damage to support elements, which invariably impacts on support performance, and instability in the stope, especially during seismic incidence. The mechanisms of damage from drilling and blasting are clearly **misunderstood** and often controversial.

At the source mines, a short study was conducted to illustrate the extent of the deviations. Figures 2-4 show data on spacing of drill holes, distance of hole to top contact, and distance of hole to bottom contact respectively. Figure 5 shows drill hole depth. The figures clearly indicate that drilling of holes is not being executed correctly:

- (Figure 2) Burdens range between 25-108cms. It is likely that the standard burdens were supposed to be between 40-50cms,
- (Figure 3) Distance of hole collar to top contact ranged between 22-50cms. The required distance would be between 10-20cms. A large distance to the top reef contact would indicate that the reef is being mined closer to the footwall,
- (Figure 4) Distance of hole collar to bottom contact ranged between 15-72cms. Again, the required distance would be between 10-20cms. A large distance to the bottom reef contact would indicate that the reef is being mined closer to the hangingwall, and,
- (Figure 5) Drill hole length ranged between 50-92 cms. This demonstrates the irregular nature of the face that may be expected after the blast. A typical conventional operation would use 1.2-1.5m drill steel, which would give an effective hole length of between 0.9-1.2m.

*"The innocent rock mass is often blamed for insufficient stability that is actually the result of rough and careless blasting. Where no precautions have been taken to avoid blasting damage, no knowledge of the real stability of the undisturbed rock can be gained from looking at the remaining wall rock. What one sees are the sad remains of what could have been – a perfectly safe and stable rock face".* 

**Holmberg and Persson in** *Underground Excavations in Rock***; E Hoek & E T Brown (1998)**





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**Figure 3. Distance from shot-holes to top reef contact**

**"Mining industry growth was greater than that of the national economy" ~Roger Baxter CEO Minerals Council (January 2019)** 



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**Figure 4. Distance from shot-holes to lower reef contact**



**Figure 5. Drill hole depth**

## **If it's not grown, it's mined**

## **3.2.2. INTERVIEWS AND AD-HOC VISITS**

Although the underground data acquisition was key to providing a technical frame of reference, interviews and ad-hoc visits (leadership behaviour and behavioural communication) provided another layer of information that shows underlying problems. The data from the interviews and ad-hoc visits are segregated in Table 1 under 5 broad categories underlying the technical deviations involved in the DB cycle:



Here the concepts Design and Technical complement each other but refer to Mine Design and Technical components of Blast Design respectively.

#### **Table 1: Issues raised through interviews and evidence concerning drill and blast practices**



In addition to the issues noted above, some stand-out comments on leadership, during the interview process, included:

- *"Miners/team leaders acknowledge that drilling into the hangingwall and footwall results in unfavourable conditions. However, from underground observations in their areas of responsibility, it is clear that the machine operators do not appreciate this fact fully and/or the miners/team leaders do not understand/care about the consequences of the poor drilling practices. It does not seem to bother the supervisors either.*
- *Teams recognised the necessity for supervisors to conduct compliance and conformance audits, but stressed that they should concentrate on their appointments as health and safety professionals:*
	- *o Supervisors should coach more;*
	- *o Must be available if help is asked for or required;*
	- *o They need to motivate the workers;*
	- *o They should not criticise the miner with the team present;*
	- *o They should give correction and advice when necessary. They should not shout but rather tell;*
	- *o They should do regular conformance checks during the shift rather than doing it after the blast when the result is visible;*
	- *o They need to show interest in each crew member and recognise their leaders;*
	- *o They must develop respect and show care toward their subordinates;*
	- *o They must communicate more with the crews about changes in the organisation, changes in management and/or changes in equipment/support;*
	- *o They should not change plans without consultation; and,*
	- *o Supervisors need to help with ordering of equipment.*
- *The training departments should conduct underground observations to ascertain if the training provided is relevant, is being executed accordingly underground, and whether there is a need to improve such training.*
- *Communication between workers and the supervisors should occur more frequently and they should be kept abreast of changes in the workplace or organisation.*
- *There is generally a perception that production pressures supercede safety concerns. Supervisors need to prioritise safety over production.*
- *Due to the activities on the face, time for drilling and conducting these activities are limited. Supervisors should acknowledge these constraints and help the crews with resolution of these challenges. The crews should form part of the solution.*
- *Supervisors do not connect with their teams and individuals on the team. Supervisors are therefore viewed as distant in their actions and are regarded merely as managers. They need to be viewed as safety intervention facilitators, as well as successful production and productivity experts."*

### **3.3. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Against the backdrop of the information provided, there are inherent and deeply rooted technical, behaviour communication and leadership behaviour challenges. Problems exist within the technical, design, quality, training and leadership domains of the drill and blast operation; and it seems that supervisors are not advocating initiatives according to their health and safety appointments.

The following sections will now provide some building blocks to create a more productive and safe operational environment.



## **Safety and Health: FIRST, ALWAYS and EVERYDAY**

## **4. UNDERSTANDING THE MINING CYCLE**

Typically, operations review (or are instructed to review) their operating systems and processes after a significant event/loss. During such a review/audit, root cause analyses are conducted for the loss event; trends are analysed, and remediation is proposed, assessed, implemented and monitored. During this process improvements in the mining cycle are often overlooked. Rather, the consequence of a poor DB cycle is analysed, rather than the root cause of the poor DB cycle.

To ensure that all stakeholders understand which aspects contribute to stability and how each could go wrong, it is important to know:

- i. What the key elements are that contribute to the mining cycle (support, drill, blast and clean) in conventional mines,
- ii. How each element contributes to the mining cycle and relative importance and effectiveness of each,
- iii. The resources (time, equipment, material, human capital, etc.) it takes to conduct/perform each element effectively,
- iv. What the consequences would be if a particular element is not executed properly, and/or if such an element does not conform to a particular standard, procedure, or process, and,
- v. How to improve the training, leadership and development of persons so that persons are able to, and likely to, show appropriate competence in the execution of each element.

### **4.1. KEY ELEMENTS WITHIN THE MINING CYCLE**

Typically, there are 4 broad activities (Support, Drill, Blast and Clean) that have to be conducted in order for a mining excavation/face/end to advance. These are represented as a cycle in Figure 6:



**Figure 6: Broad activities within a mining cycle**



The cycle may begin at any point but often starts with an unsupported, clean face. The face then has to be inspected and supported (Figure 7). Thereafter, the face is drilled (Figure 8),blasted (Figure 9) and then cleaned (Figure 10). Each activity has several sub-processes or work activities/packages that need to be completed in order to achieve an efficient and successful blast.

The figures show examples of activities that may be present in an operational mining cycle in a conventional tabular mine. There are, therefore, at least 80 processes/activities/tasks in such an extraction sequence, and several operations may still conduct activities that may not be accounted for in these figures.

From a safety perspective, having such **a large number of activities could attract non-conformances/noncompliances** as time constraints may not permit all activities from being conducted efficiently, effectively or to standard. Shortcuts in activities could lead to incidents and accidents. However, standards, procedures and processes are meant to achieve both safety and productivity gains, and as such, if all activities are conducted according to the mine standards and procedures, both should be achieved.



#### **Figure 7: SUPPORT INSTALLATION FLOW CHART**



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#### **Figure 9: BLAST FLOW CHART**





**Figure 10: CLEANING FLOW CHART**

### **4.2. THE TIMEFRAME AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION FOR EACH ELEMENT**

It is imperative that each operation conducts a proper work study for its mining cycle. Each activity that is completed, according to a set of standards or procedures, will be assessed for a time range. These time allocations would then be fed into the calculation of an overall mining cycle time for that operation. Note that travelling time needs to be added to such a calculation to get an overall timeframe for each human capital resource.

Once the time assessment has been conducted, the required skill set and required resources (equipment and material) can be allocated accordingly. Procurement processes and just-in-time resource deliveries to site can then be advocated.

### **4.3. MANAGEMENT OF THE MINING CYCLE**

In order to manage this process, it is important that the operation utilises a Work Study Program or a Work Breakdown Structure (WBS). The second term is borrowed from the Project Management discipline where each component of a particular project is broken down, assessed, scheduled and managed within strict deliverables, controls and time.

In order to achieve significant gains in productivity and efficiency, the mining cycle on a mine should be managed with similar strict controls. In addition to providing enhanced stability in the rockmass, these controls will also allow financial gains through efficient use of resources and provide opportunities to improve compliance to the regulatory and mandatory activities within the cycle.



## **4.4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR EXECUTION OF AN ELEMENT/S**

At the onset, the value proposition for this MOSH reference guide was to craft and enable a safer environment by understanding the components of the mining cycle and adopting measures to improve each. In so doing, both production and safety is enhanced. However, it is important to inculcate behaviours and leadership traits that illicit the ideal culture. Each person that is responsible in the mining cycle needs to be aware of what the consequences are should a particular element not be performed to the required criteria.

An example of such an intervention would be to help the crews understand what impact poor drilling discipline has on ground stability. If shot holes are marked (Figure 11) correctly, but drilled incorrectly (Figure 12), the detonation of such a hole may damage the hangingwall and/or footwall. This may lead to strata control difficulties and additional barring may be required to attain the required stability. The time taken for the additional barring could have been used for other critical jobs.



**Figure 11. Accurate, clear marking of the face to indicate where the shot-holes should be drilled is critical to executing a good blast**

## **ZERO HARM**



#### **Figure 12. Position of sockets from the previous blast indicating poor drilling angles**

In addition, optimal mining practices may have further benefits:

- **Value chain gains** 
	- o Explosives are used more efficiently in that all the available explosive energy is used to fracture the rockmass. Energy is not "lost" during the blast;
	- o The maximum designed advance per blast is achieved;
	- o Lost blasts are minimised;
	- o Good fragmentation, as designed, will result in the reduction of secondary blasting at the tips and reduced milling costs;
	- o Uniform fragmentation also results in improved cleaning times;
	- o Damage to support is minimal and therefore replacement of damaged support is reduced;
	- o Muckpile position is optimised to ensure more efficient cleaning of the broken ore;
	- o The face is blasted more solid and hence less barring (less time) is required therewith increasing the face time available for drilling; and,
	- o Mining a stope width as designed reduces the requirement to order additional oversize support units.

#### • **Business optimisation**

- o Business plans can be achieved. This leads to targets being met and improved;
- o With targets met, crews achieve incentives;
- o Ore is transported regularly so mill efficiency is maintained;
- o Less dilution of the broken ore means reduced waste throughput; and,
- o Human capital and resources are used optimally.

From the discussion, it is imperative that all individuals responsible in the mining cycle understand the consequences of poor execution of the elements within the mining cycle and that it is incumbent on them to eradicate non-compliances.

## **Safety is our No1 Priority**

### **5. TOWARDS INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE MINING CYCLE**

Figure 13 shows an ideal DB scene where one can identify that the 4 main activities described in Figure 6, Section 4.1., have been successfully achieved:

- a) **Support** temporary and permanent support installed; barring completed,
- b) **Drill** correct marking, correct angle and inclination of drilling, correct position relative to marking clean appropriate equipment used, and ancillary equipment in good order,
- c) **Blast** previous blast sockets treated; clean straight face; no overhanging face; barricade in place; even footwall, and,
- d) **Clean** Clean footwall; dust allayed.



**Figure 13. Drilling at right angles to a well-marked face, with top and bottom contact lines and drilling direction lines indicated. The angle of the drill is close to parallel to the top contact**

To aid in the creation and successful detonation of the stope in Figure 13, the DB practitioner should also use information provided in Tables 2-4. These utilise best practices from other conventional operations, as well as relevant research. For ease of use, the tables are segregated according to the 3 legs of the MOSH LP Adoption Strategy:

- Technical,
- Behavioural Communication, and,
- Leadership Behaviour.

## **Safety rules are your best tools**

### **Table 2: Mining Cycle Leading Practices from various operations – MOSH Technical components**



#### **Table 3: Mining Cycle Leading Practices from various operations – MOSH Behavioural Communication components**



#### **Table 4: Mining Cycle Leading Practices from various operations – MOSH Leadership Behaviour components**



## **5.1. BLAST DESIGN**

### **5.1.1.OVERVIEW**

The effectiveness of the blast can be attributed to 2 main factors:

- a. The technical ability of the detonation system to move the rockmass in the desired manner, and,
- b. The ground reaction to the force applied to it.

**Designed** Ground **Explosive Reaction** 

Tables 5 and 6 show those elements attributed to each of the factors listed above. The tables are by no means exhaustive; other elements may also contribute to the detonation.

Figure 14 redistributes the information in Tables 5 and 6 in a visual format. The idea is to remove ore efficiently from its in-situ position, whilst *"minimising energy consumption in comminution"* (Silva, et al, 2017).

## **"Safety First" is "Safety Always." ~Charles M. Hayes**

#### **Table 5: Explosive Technical elements involved in the blast design and relevant terminology**



### **Table 6: Ground reaction elements involved in the blast design and relevant terminology**





**Figure 14. Factors influencing a blast design**

## **5.1.2. DISCUSSION**

Whereas a comprehensive discussion and understanding of each of the elements may be beneficial, the purpose of this document is not to provide additional training material for blast design, but to highlight those elements that may have the highest improvement potential for DB. Therefore, variations and exceptions to each of the elements, have to be keenly studied and understood to ensure optimisation of the DB cycle.

Examples of potential improvements may lie in the discussion of the following elements:

- a. *Charge length*: The entire shot hole column does not need an explosive charge. COMRO 1990, studies indicated that only **1/2 to 1/3 of the shot hole** length needs to be **charged**. In addition, this explosive should be inserted from the toe of the hole, as it is further from the free face during detonation and requires more energy to break and heave. The third of the hole near the hole collar is closer to the free face and therefore requires little to no energy to break it – it will heave as the toe breaks. If the entire hole is charged flyrock may damage support units and ground vibration could result in hangingwall instability.
- b. *Advance per blast* In addition, the mine should undertake an assessment of whether a large advance per blast (1.5-3.5m), or smaller **incremental advances** (<1.0m) are more productive. Factors to be considered would include, the efficiency of the cleaning cycle, the bulking factor of a particular rock type, and what the panel lengths are? Smaller advances result in less broken ore to be cleaned per cycle, resulting in panels being blasted regularly, support being installed timeously, and a **quality blast per day**. In addition, the use of smaller explosive charges result in less gas pressure into the hangingwall, resulting in less fracturing of the rockmass. The excavation is more stable and less barring is required.

## **SMART - Safety Means Always Remember Teamwork**

 c. *Rock Factor*: Different rock types require different explosive types with different delays between shot holes. Much work has been done in the surface blasting and coal mining sector, but the technologies have not been researched thoroughly for other underground mines. A surface blasting rock factor consideration is used as an example. Figure 15 shows how an explosive is matched to a particular rockmass characteristic and a stemming length. Table 7 uses an applicable rockmass factor as an input into blast design.

A sub-set of considerations must also be made when considering preconditioning:

- Without production detonation;
- Prior to production detonation; or,
- In sequence with production detonation.

The rock factor and stress related thereto should also be considered when designing line drilling and/or perimeter (preand-post-split) blasting.



**Figure 15. Matching rock and explosive type to required stemming (Explosives Today, 1987, described by Boshoff, 2015)**

## **Safety and Health: FIRST, ALWAYS and EVERYDAY**

#### **Table 7. Estimation of Surface Mines's Rock Factor (Explosives Today, 1987, described by Boshoff, 2015) for blast design**



- d. *Stemming or Tamping*  Boshoff (2015) relates that *"the main purpose of stemming is to retain the energy long enough that it was intended for. The retention of energy allows for more work to be done to the rock…"* It is therefore imperative that shot holes are stemmed, even when using emulsions. The **lack of stemming** allows for:
	- Blast energy to escape from the hole,
	- Waste of explosives, when such explosives are used for tamping,
	- Damage to the rockmass, as the excessive energy permeates and vibrates the hangingwall,
	- Damage to support as flyrock may dislodge installed support, or render them ineffective, and,
	- Damage to stope infrastructure.



**Figure 16. Energy blow-out from blast hole as a result of a lack of stemming (COMRO, 1990)**

 Armstrong (1993) also found that the fragmentation size decreases with increasing confinement of the energy. Hence, more work is done (fracturing) to the rock allowing for smaller size rock fragments. This allows for better transport of the ore, but can also have a negative effect should the fragmentation be too fine, especially in the high value gold deposits.

## **ZERO HARM**

 Otounye (1981) found that an *"efficient stemming material is one that rapidly compacts when subjected to high explosive pressures after detonation"*. This means that should the stemming material compact slowly, the gases from the explosives would escape in between the stemming particles before those gaps can be sealed.

 Stemming length has also been confined to rules of thumb as there is no clear and concise method of determining an optimal length. Rules of thumb include:

- 1-1.2 x burden length,
- 1/3 of the blast hole length,
- 3 x hole diameter when high compaction aggregates are used,
- 10 x hole diameter when low compaction materials are used, and,
- 20 x hole diameter for a preconditioning hole.

Some of the parameters that need to be considered when selecting a stemming product are:

- *Rock strength* hard rocks need lower length; soft rocks need longer lengths to take into account hole deformation and spalling at the hole. Figure 16, gives an indication of such differences. For soft rock, the stemming length is approximately 40% more than for hard rock when using ANFO or Powergel 150. Rock factors for surface operations are shown in Table 7. However, the charge length for each is unknown,
- *Velocity of Detonation (VOD)* High VOD explosives need a shorter stemming length whereas lower VOD explosives need longer stemming lengths due to an increasing need for confinement,
- *Strength of explosive* higher strength needs longer stemming,
- *Density of explosive* higher density needs longer stemming, and,
- *Length of explosive column.*
- e. *Panel length* If a proper understanding of a blast cycle is understood and the relative timeframes for each component is clearly described, all components can be optimised for the available face time with the number of resources available. Therefore, quality work for each of the elements, listed in Figures 7-10, can be practiced. In this study, the available face time for the resources employed will be known and hence the length of the panel can be deduced to optimise the resources effectively. Hence, if additional resources are employed, face lengths can increase.

## **Safety is our No1 Priority**

## **5.2. TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE THE DRILL AND BLAST CYCLE**

In order to augment and improve the drill and blast cycle, opportunities and technologies exist within the mining supply chain industry. The ensuing discussion will focus mainly on augmenting the training, technical and quality components of the DB cycle.

### **5.2.1. TRAINING IMPROVEMENTS - 3D SIMULATION AND VIRTUAL REALITY**

At least 2 South African platinum mines, 1 African mine, 1 South African Mining Industry Supplier and several international operations, use Virtual Reality (VR) training (Figures 17-20). This technology has sprouted increasing opportunities for the workforce to attain and improve their skills. Current VR simulations encompass a projected development rock face (Virtual Reality Wall) where trainees are practically trained on:

- 1. How to take line and grade,
- 2. Mark off a blast pattern/burden, and,
- 3. Sequence the round (timing) to ensure the correct firing of the 'blast pattern' is attained.

This augments the theoretical training and has the following advantages for the blended approach to training:

- The incumbent/trainee is trained theoretically and is then allowed to perform the task on the VR practically,
- It is an immersive experience where the underground setting is emulated. Trainees are encouraged to wear the required underground clothes and personal protective equipment (PPE),
- The activity of the person performing the actions are monitored and can be used to improve the person's capabilities/skills with further interventions,
- Relatively cost effective if compared to how much wasteful expenditure, as a result of poor blasting, can be prevented,
- The ability and competency can be tested immediately. The person does not have to go to the workplace and be tested on site,
- The resources and time taken for the training is minimal, depending on the individual being found competent,
- The system can be configured for each type of blast round,
- A Trigger Action Response Program (TARP) may be added to the VR experience. An example thereof may be geological triggers that could give rise to a FOG,
- The system also allows the trainee exposure to interactive functionalities associated with computers, and,
- After the theoretical and surface practical training is completed, underground assessments can be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the blended training methods. Review and improvements in both the technology and theory can then be done.



## **Safety rules are your best tools**



**Figure 17. Virtual Reality Wall (VRW) training in the "classroom" simulating a development end**



**Figure 18. Virtual Reality Wall (VRW) training – person performing the marking task**

**"Safety First" is "Safety Always." ~Charles M. Hayes**



**Figure 19. Virtual Reality Wall (VRW) training – person performing the timing/sequencing of the blast**



**Figure 20. Virtual Reality Wall (VRW) training – showing the consequences of incorrect sequencing on a blast** 

**Safety is about doing the right thing, even if no one is looking, because safety starts with me!**

## **5.2.2. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF DRILL QUALITY**

Drill hole quality can be measured after the drilling hole has been complete and cleaned. Surveys of drill holes could include:

- Length the actual length of the hole can be measured against the design length,
- Width the roundness of the hole may indicate stress, as well as the quality of the drill steel used;
- Direction the angle relative to the design could indicate how successful the blast would be, as well as indicating where the muckpile may be;
- Linearity has the hole deviated significantly over the short distance;
- Elevation is the hole drilled into the hangingwall or footwall.

These measurements can be captured using readily available measuring tools like a clinoruler and to a lesser extent, a charging stick. The auditor could capture the data on a data processing unit and the information gleaned through this process could be used to give feedback, guidance and coaching of drilling quality to the crew, even before the blast occurs. Through this intervention, the drill crew may be able to understand the consequences of their drill behaviour. The crew may also be able to give feedback on how they may be able to improve and optimise their time to ensure that a good quality blast is obtained.

In addition, there are tools and technologies that do exist to improve drill quality. Although both have been trialled, their widespread adoption has been constrained by perceived cost, the lack of capital to manufacture the units and resistance from the crews. However, for the purposes of completeness, a summary of the tools may be useful.

### **5.2.3. CENTRALISED BLASTING**

The Centralised Blasting concept or Multiple Panel Simultaneous Detonation has been used primarily on the deep level gold mines on the Far West Rand. The concept is described as the detonation of a number of panels/ends and/or stopes on a particular operation at the same time. In addition the concept has been used for detonation of stopes between mines. Inter-mine centralised blasting has occurred between the then Goldfield's (now SibanyeStillwater) Driefontein West Mines Division and Anglo Gold Ashanti in order to reduce the likelihood of regional redistribution of stress on geological features as a result of blasting activity. At the time, panels on the two mines were being blasted in close proximity to each other, along a common boundary pillar. In addition, geological features traversed the mine boundaries. It was hypothesised that should latent blast energies activate these features on the one mine, it may result in rockmass failure on the other before workers had left the workings. From a worker exposure perspective, blasting at the same time meant that:

- Workings were clear of mine personnel by a certain time,
- No blasting would take place before such time,
- A central communication office would alert the 2 mines when workings are clear,
- If there was a delay, both mines would be affected.
- If the day's work was not finished at the recommended blasting time, the workers would not be able to stay to complete those activities,
- Workers are at a lower risk fatigue profile if they only work their normal hours, and,
- It helps with the re-entry period of workers.

 Hence, the concept resulted in a more regional effect rather than a local one. Any latent ground motion on geological structures would occur and be concentrated during the immediate period (seismic window) after the blast. The effect would be more general, regional type of destressing as any instability on the regional geological features would be triggered resulting in a theoretically safer working environment when workers are at the face. It also determines when seismic incidences are relatively lower after the blast so that workers may enter the workings.

Centralised blasting is also characterised as regional preconditioning.

## **SMART - Safety Means Always Remember Teamwork**

### **6. CONCLUSIONS**

In pursuance of the need by industry to improve the safety, efficiency and productivity of the drill and blast cycle, the COM MOSH LH FOG Team sourced "best" practices from a number of mining operations, conducted interviews, reviewed relevant subject matter research and tabled innovations that could result in improving the extraction process. It was clear that the understanding of the mining cycle process was imperative to attain these goals - key elements of the Support, Drill, Blast and Clean process were described. The intention is to improve mine training material, as well as workers' behaviour through consequential thinking. In addition, details on blast design and other technical elements were described to aid the operation in improving their extraction process.

It is envisaged that the adoption of this Leading Practice will undoubtedly lead to significant safety improvements in the industry, particularly in the FOG space where accidents persist. Using the MOSH approach, more reward is gained from understanding of the initiative; documenting best practices from participating mines; and providing guidance on redirecting people's behaviour so that a culture shift is achieved.

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## **Every person going home from work unharmed everyday**

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