

Asbestos-related disease sufferers receive R147,5m

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A total of R147,5-million has been paid out to people suffering from asbestos-related diseases since the inception of the Asbestos Relief Trust (ART) and the Kgalagadi Relief Trust (KRT), which compensate qualifying people who are ill as a result of exposure to the fibrous mineral. The ART and the KRT have been in existence since 2003 and 2006 respectively.

The ART has paid out R127,5-million, with the KRT accounting for the remaining R20-million.

During its 2007/8 financial year, the ART paid out R30,2-million to 595 claimants, an increase of 11,3% compared with the figure for the previous financial year. A further 312 claims, totalling R11,6-million, have been approved for payment.

And during its 2007/8 fiscal year, the KRT paid out R13,6-million to 266 claimants, this number representing an increase of more than 50% on the number of claimants compensated in the previous financial year.

At the end of February this year, a further 114 claims, totalling R5,5-million, were approved for payment. However, this has not been paid out as a result of a lack of banking details for the claimants and the noncompletion of release and discharge forms.

Potential claimants are also being located in Lesotho, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal the Free State, Malawi and Botswana.

While the number of reported cases of asbestos-related diseases is decreasing, the severity of the cases is increasing. There has been an increase in the incidence of mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer claimants.

"This is a worrying factor and until we get a grip on it and actually understand the exposure, we have to manage this risk," ART chairperson Phiroshaw Camay tells *Mining Weekly*. While the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has been commended for conducting detailed research into environmental asbestos contamination and for the recent legislation banning the use of asbestos in South Africa, a significant challenge is that too many communities remain at risk from environmental exposure.

In some areas in South Africa, such as Penge, in Limpopo province, Msauli and Burgersfort, in Mpumalanga, and Pomfret, in the North West, asbestos is found "everywhere", says **KRT chairperson Brian Gibson**.

"[Asbestos] lies freely across the countryside and many people have used asbestos tailings to make bricks for their homes. One can literally pull out fibres from the wall" he states.

Hundreds of kilometres of roads in the Northern Cape are contaminated with asbestos, he says, adding that these places were, "in the opinion of many, not habitable".

Gibson says that relocating communities will be expensive and challenging. There are 19 schools in Kuruman, in the Northern Cape, that are built from asbestos and require immediate attention in terms of preventing the risk of environmental exposure, especially to future generations.

"Our involvement with communities has led to a deeper understanding of the extreme poverty in previous asbestos-mining communities and the helplessness of the communities

that remain in the areas. Our commissioned research in the Penge community clearly demonstrates that these areas are not habitable and present a constant danger. We believe that only national government-sponsored initiatives will assist in reducing the inherent risk presented to local inhabitants," says **Camay**.

He says that the scourge of both primary and secondary environmental pollution has been extensively canvassed with the provincial political leadership in the Northern Cape, leading to a decision to hold a national asbestos conference in October this year.

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