

SA mine deaths rose 33% in the first half 2021

South Africa's mines recorded 32 deaths in the first half of 2021 compared with 24 during the same period in 2020, the mines ministry said, continuing a spike in deaths which began last year in some of the world's deepest mines.



A mine worker is seen underground in South Deep mine outside Johannesburg, file. Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

The country's mines, some of which are nearly 4km deep, have seen a regression in safety from record lows recorded in 2019 with the death toll last year up around 18% in 2020.

"We are still greatly concerned that we are still experiencing these accidents," said Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's chief inspector of mines David Msiza.

Mining injuries during the first of the year also rose to 1,066 from 679 during the same period a year earlier, Msiza said adding that the Covid-19 lockdown meant mines were not operating at full capacity in 2020.

Rock fall incidents including seismic events remained a significant challenge for the platinum and the gold sectors, while transport related accidents mostly affected the coal and platinum sectors.

Not acceptable

"In 2021 we are seeing a worsening of the fatality trend, this is not acceptable to the Minerals Council and our members," said Minerals Council president Nolutha Fakude.

Government and industry said they were working on improving the fatality record by addressing behavioural changes, the impact of the pandemic, technology development and ensuring there were enough rock engineers and seismic experts.

Poor safety numbers in South African mines are a concern for unions, communities and investors, and contribute to the lower valuations of the country's operating companies compared with global peers.

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