

Occupational Health and Safety in the Formal and Informal Mining Sectors: A Critical Factor in the Sustainable Development of Mineral Resources

**Jessica E. Kogel
NIOSH**

Mining has the reputation for being one of the most dangerous occupations; however, over the last century there have been significant improvements in mining occupational health and safety performance. Unfortunately, these improvements have not been consistent across the industry and progress has lagged in developing countries as well as in the informal mining sector. Mining companies operating in the formal sector devote significant resources to ensuring the health and safety of their workforce but, despite these efforts, the goal of achieving zero fatalities, injuries and illnesses has not been met. The changing nature of work and the adoption of automation and mechanization present both challenges and opportunities for worker health and safety. The informal sector faces a different set of challenges related to weak legal, regulatory and policy frameworks as well as reliance on vulnerable and marginalized workers. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that in 2003 13 million people worked in the informal mining sector with a significant portion of the workforce comprised of women (50%) and children. By 2014 employment in this sector had grown to 20 to 30 million miners. The formal mining sector, by contrast, employs 9 million workers globally. For mineral resource development to be sustainable it must adhere to principles that support and promote social justice, economic equality and environmental stewardship for all. Occupational health and safety is naturally linked to these principles because occupational injuries, fatalities and illness have enormous social and economic impacts for workers, their families and their communities. Good occupational health and safety practices not only protect the worker's health, safety and working capacity but these practices also contribute to improved environmental and economic outcomes that benefit workers and society at large. The unique occupational health and safety challenges that characterize the formal and informal sectors must be addressed with practical solutions that target the specific needs of each these worker populations. Finally, there must be a strong focus on the informal mining sector which poses the greatest risk to workers.