

The Changing Face of Mining



Ms Precious Makine

A learnership is one of the learning programmes the MQA administers for the mining sector to contribute towards people empowerment and transformation. It consists of a structured learning component and practical work experience component. A learnership can only be offered by an accredited training provider. For a learnership to take effect there must be a host employer, an accredited training provider and a learner.

The three parties must sign a learning agreement which has to be registered by the MQA. The MQA provides grants to companies that offer learnerships to learners. Matete Precious Makine is a beneficiary of an MQA learnership.

Q. What company do you work for and what is your profession?

A. I work for Samancor Eastern Chrome mine near Lydenburg in Limpopo. I am a learner miner on an MQA Learnership.

Q. What is a learner miner?

A. A learner miner is a person who is employed by the mine before entering into a rock breaking learnership. They are enrolled into this learnership programme which ultimately gives them a rock breaking certificate (also known as a blasting certificate); mining companies prefer to call them learner miners. On successful completion the learners are appointed as miners, stopers or developers.

Q. What subjects are required, for one to be accepted as a learner miner?

A. Grade twelve maths and science.

Q. How long have you been with Samancor Eastern Chrome mine?

A. Since 02 June 2011.

Q. How did you get to be on the MQA learnership?

A. Samancor mine had advertised the opportunity to apply for the learnership in the local newspaper. I applied and my application was successful. It has always been my dream to become a miner.

Q. What inspired you to apply for a mining learnership?

A. I have always liked mining, even when I was still in high school, and wanted to study Mining Engineering but unfortunately my family could not afford to take me to university. They only managed to take me to an FET college where I completed my N2 and N3.

Q. Describe a typical day underground for a learner miner

A. A miner position is a legal appointment in terms of the Mine Health and Safety Act. This person is responsible for the blasting operations of rocks using the explosives in a mining environment to ensure that big rocks are broken into pieces. These pieces are then hoisted or taken out of the mining environment to the surface. The metallurgical department is then involved with the processing. A miner leads an underground team which is made up of about 13 team members comprising machine operators (known as rock drill operators), winch operators (responsible for sweeping the blasted materials/ores/rocks), stope timbers (responsible for installing the support), cheesas (known as blasting assistance – responsible for charging up), as well as a stope team leader/development team learner as an immediate supervisor.

Q. As a young woman, what do you perceive to be a challenge working with male counterparts?

A. Due to the fact that there are not as many women pursuing mining as a career, men believe that women cannot cope with the job requirements. My determination and dedication is what will ultimately change how men view us as women.

Q. How far would you want to pursue your mining career?

A. I still want to study further. Most people refer to a miner as a person who works in the mine. I think it is very important that one must indicate that a miner is an occupation on an official level. In terms of career progression, the next level after a miner is a shift supervisor/shift boss, then a mine overseer (MO) for which one must obtain a MO certificate, then a section manager/production manager for which a mine manager certificate of competency (MMC) is required and, finally, a mine manager or general manager (coupled with academic qualifications e.g. BSc Mining).

Q. Would you encourage other young ladies to pursue mining as a career?

A. Yes, as a young woman I would like to encourage other women to face their fears about working in mines. Things have drastically changed from when women were only expected to work in the kitchen. There are so many opportunities for women today that contribute to our empowerment.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to share?

A. Most young people in our communities are not aware that they are residing on very rich soil as a result of the minerals found underground. South Africa is my country and very rich in minerals. I want to be counted as one of the people who make it possible for our economy to grow.

For more information please contact the Mining Qualifications Authority on www.mqa.org.za or 011 547 2600.