

Arming against HIV/AIDS



Health education and awareness

Through programmes conducted at Rio Tinto operations, employees are told the most effective weapon against HIV/AIDS is not a drug or a lifestyle, but to know one's HIV status. This knowledge will help them manage the disease and live a healthy life.



Programmes are being conducted to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS at Rio Tinto operations, especially in southern Africa where the epidemic is greatest.

Businesses have comprehensive programmes including education and awareness about AIDS for workers and local communities. Employees are told the most effective weapon against HIV/AIDS is not a drug or a lifestyle, but to know one's HIV status. This knowledge will help them manage the disease and live a healthy life.

Affordable access is provided for employees and their nominated partner to treatment that includes antiretroviral therapy. Employees are strongly advised to take voluntary counselling and testing to empower them to manage their health using the wellness and treatment options available.

Richards Bay Minerals in South Africa uses theatre to reinforce safety messages and HIV/AIDS awareness at employee functions, such as safety award ceremonies. Theatrical company Blue Moon uses music and song to enhance messages to a cross cultural audience. In 2004, Richards Bay produced *United against AIDS*, a simple and informative booklet that describes the nature of sexually transmitted diseases, the importance of individuals determining their HIV status, the treatment of AIDS, and tips on how individuals can arm themselves against the disease by knowing fact from myth.

Both Richards Bay Minerals and Palabora Mining Company, another Rio Tinto in South Africa company that offers similar programmes through the Palabora Foundation, make extensive use of peer educators. These are fellow workers and community members who have received training to advise and assist co-workers and community members on matters relating to HIV/AIDS. At Phalaborwa "HIV ambassadors" distribute a health porridge and multi-vitamins to increase immunity among HIV sufferers, and male and female condoms to promote safe sex. Both operations offer free counselling and testing, as well as condom dispensers in washrooms and change rooms throughout their sites and in high risk areas in the community.

A similar focus exists at other southern African operations such as Rössing Uranium in Namibia, Murowa in Zimbabwe and Rio Tinto Exploration in Botswana and South Africa. Discrimination towards employees on the basis of real or perceived HIV status is not tolerated. The confidentiality of all information on the HIV status and condition of employees and community members is strictly upheld and HIV/AIDS screening is not undertaken during recruitment or as a condition of employment.



Above: A selection of goods that the HIV ambassadors hand out to people in their communities in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Left: RBM's fulltime shop steward, Linda Mdletshe (left) and his sister, Gcina Mdletshe, a Supercare cleaning contractor, examine one of the HIV/AIDS publications that are available to RBM employees and contractors at the clinic on site.

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