

CAPE TOWN April 28 Sapa
MINE DEATHS ON DECLINE: UNION

Mine deaths have shown a downward curve, but safety technology is still deficient, the union Solidarity said on Wednesday.

"Although mine deaths in South Africa are showing a downward curve, mine safety technology is still deficient and leaves room for improvement," Paul Mardon, the union's head of occupational health and safety, said in a statement commemorating the International Labour Organisation's World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

"All stakeholders in the mining industry worked together to create a safer environment and the decrease in mine deaths over the past year shows that these contributions are paying off."

Mardon said that in 2007, some 221 miners -- more than four workers per week, died on South African mines. By 2009 this figure decreased to 165 -- three workers per week.

"In the first 16 weeks of the year alone, 29 workers died on local mines, which comes to approximately 1.8 deaths per week.

"This figure is relatively low and looks promising if projections are made.

"The first third of the year has passed and it appears that deaths are on the decrease. However, one death is still one death too many."

Mardon said although obstacles such as the extreme depth of some South African mines increased danger, a lot could be done to improve technology aimed at preventing mining accidents.

"Technology that is currently used to measure underground seismic activity, for example, can monitor movement in rock to a thousandth of a millimetre, but is still not accurate enough.

"In spite of this technology, the time and location of a rockfall still cannot be predicted with complete accuracy."