AEMFC aiming to increase output from 1.6Mt to 2.2Mt by end of current fiscal year

AEMFC aiming to increase output from 1.6Mt to 2.2Mt by end of current fiscal year

15th May 2015 By: **Ilan Solomons** - Creamer Media Staff Writer

VLAKFONTEIN MINING PIT To meet the target of increasing production output, Vlakfontein is undertaking a R155-million Phase 2 expansion project
Photo by: Duane Daws

State-owned mining company African Exploration Mining & Finance Corporation's (AEMFC's) Vlakfontein mine's current run-of-mine (RoM) production averages about 1.6-million tons a year, which the company aims to increase to about 2.2-million tons by the end of the current financial year, says Vlakfontein mine manager **David Kobuoe**.

Speaking to Mining Weekly during a visit to Vlakfontein last month, Kobuoe said the company also aimed to produce about three-million tons of RoM coal over the next three to five years to supply the Kendal and Kusile power stations, both of which are situated about 12 km from the mine.

To meet the target of increasing production, Vlakfontein is undertaking a R155-million Phase 2 expansion project.

The expansion project is located close to the existing mining area.
Kobuoe said Vlakfontein's Phase 1 operation would be operational until at least the end of 2016 and that the existing mine infrastructure from the Phase 1 operation would remain in use.

"Coal will be removed from the other mining blocks and trucked to the existing screen and crushing plant area. After extraction, the coal will be received at the existing crushing plant, where it will be crushed and stockpiled," he explained.

The construction of the infrastructure, such as roads for the other blocks, will take place within an area of about 100 ha and the truck-and-shovel mining method will be used to mine the coal. Topsoil and overburden stockpile areas will also be established.

The expansion project will also require diverting a tributary of the Saalboomspruit stream to dry out the wetland for mining.

Water management structures associated with the stream diversion include the construction of canals, channels, bridges, weirs and bulk stormwater outlets.

The project will also require the construction of two pollution control dams.

"The expansion is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016," stated Kobuoe.

The company is cash positive, recording R33.5-million in operating profits during the 2014 financial year.

Vlakfontein operates a two-team, 10 h/d shift system from Sunday to Friday, and employs mainly young people from the nearby Phola township, Emalahleni, Middleburg, Delmas and other surrounding towns.

The production system takes the form of mining, crushing and screening without any washing.

AEMFC has retained mining contractor Concor Opencast Mining, a division of construction firm Murray & Roberts Construction, to undertake the primary earthmoving and mining activities at Vlakfontein.

"This move was carefully considered in light of the start-up operation having no specific funds war chest to rely on, particularly for the purchase of articulated dump trucks and other large earthmoving equipment," Kobuoe explained.

The company directly employs about 90 people on site, with an additional 200 mineworkers subcontracted to the mine through Concor.

"We currently undertake about 30% of work carried out on the mine . . . but we plan to gradually . . . become an owner-operated mine over the next five to seven years," Kobuoe highlighted.

Vlakfontein’s mining and processing assets consist of a R35-million screening and crushing plant; three Bell 6 m3 front-end loaders, a compact track loader; and a water bowser dust-suppression machine, among other assets.

Kobuoe noted that the mine’s screening and crushing plant could process about 700 t/h at maximum capacity, but processed 450 t/h to 600 t/h on average. He added that the plant could process between 2.5-million tons and 3-million tons of material a year.

The plant could easily be adapted to increase production volumes if required, he noted.

Safety

Kobuoe highlighted that Vlakfontein had been doing extremely well in terms of safety.

From April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015, the mine recorded no lost-time injuries and no fatalities.

“We place major emphasis on safety . . . and ensure that no one, whether an executive manager or . . . [a] mineworker, is above complying with safety regulations on site.

“When . . . a challenge is emerging or a potential hazard is arising, we address it immediately,” stressed Kobuoe.

AEMFC corporate strategy and planning GM Sicelo Sikakane added during the site visit that the company benchmarked itself against the leading local and international mining companies to ensure that all aspects of the operation were optimally efficient and cost effective.

“AEMFC has a management team in place with many years of experience in global financial, marketing and mining organisations, which enables us to ensure that we adhere to only the highest standards,” he concluded.

Phone:+27 (0)11 622 3744