



ISO14001 certification for AngloGold Ashanti Health

Achieving and maintaining ISO14001 certification at all operations is integral to AngloGold Ashanti's environmental management strategy. This applies to AngloGold Ashanti Health, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company operating in South Africa, that provides healthcare services to 35,000 employees.

In March 2007, Mrs Veronica van Ede (Manager: West Wits and Nursing) was appointed to lead the project team tasked with planning and implementing ISO14001 certification, which was achieved in a relatively short period of time.

AngloGold Ashanti Health operates two hospitals, Western Deep Levels and West Vaal, with 152 and 259 beds respectively. Together with the two occupational health centres, one in each region, and the dressing stations in close proximity to the shafts, AngloGold Ashanti Health provides a complete primary health care service, occupational health surveillance and a full range of general and specialist services.

Key steps in planning for ISO14001 accreditation included the development of an environmental policy and associated procedures.

"With AngloGold Ashanti's environmental policy already in place, our key task was to identify issues critical to our area of the business," says Van Ede. Three such issues were identified by the project team:

- management of health care waste;
- setting targets for a reduction in water and energy consumption; and
- the elimination of alien vegetation.

"The first issue was the only one specific to the health care environment, with the others being more generic," says Van Ede. "Health care waste covers anything that has come into contact with patients: dressings, syringes and other equipment, and medical devices. Key aspects are the establishment of a system, raising awareness among staff, and the selection of a safe, environmentally-friendly disposal system. Most of these requirements had already been addressed, but the project gave us an opportunity to review the entire process from start to finish."

Comprehensive guidelines are now in place covering handling, packing and labelling. All health care waste from both regions is transported in appropriately registered vehicles to a central facility (North West Medical Waste near Orkney) for incineration.

The second critical issue involved setting targets for reduction in electricity and water consumption. "Establishing our actual consumption proved surprisingly complex, particularly at the hospital," says Van Ede. "At West Vaal, hospital-specific metering capacity was in place, but this had to be installed at Western Deep Levels hospital. At this stage, we have implemented a staff awareness programme: employees are given guidelines on avoiding waste and encouraged to apply these in their own homes as well as in the work situation. Our current target is an annual reduction of 0.5% in both electricity and water consumption."

Tackling the third issue involved the eradication of declared Category 1 invader plants from the grounds of both hospitals. "The hospital gardening services have implemented a spraying programme to prevent re-growth," says Van Ede. "We held a tree-planting ceremony in September to mark Arbor Day, and have replaced some of the material we removed with indigenous trees."

The health services' environmental management programme was audited by DQS, with certification granted in December 2007.

Van Ede reports that the project team received a number of commendations. These included: the evident commitment of management to the process; the degree of involvement of management and staff; the effectiveness of the management system; general good housekeeping; and the competence of all concerned with the implementation process.

The DQS audit identified a few minor non-conformances (for example the need for clearer and more specific briefing of targets to lower-level staff), and these are receiving attention.

Looking ahead, plans for 2008 include the extension of the environmental management system to two additional areas: the management of chemicals and a disposal/recycling programme for plastic containers.

"We already have procedures in place for managing the use of chemical substances, for example in laboratory tests, the development of X-ray films, and in various treatment protocols," says Van Ede. "We will focus on implementing a detailed investigation into any environmental impact that may arise from their disposal."