WHERE WE STARTED
The Advisory Council for Occupational Health and Safety (ACOHS) identified silicosis as an occupational disease contributing a large burden to the compensation fund. It then decided that the Department of Labour (DOL) as a lead agent in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) should develop a National Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis (NPES) in line with the ILO/WHO Global Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis.

The National Working Group was established in 2003, made up of representatives from DOL (as chair), Departments of Health, Minerals and Energy and Environmental Affairs, Compensation Commissioner, organized business, organized labour, occupational hygienists, occupational medicine practitioners and a technical advisor. The NWG was mandated to draft and implement the NPES using the guidelines that were provided by the ILO.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NWG
Over and above the development and implementation of the NPES, the NWG had to ensure that there was adequate consultation with other social partners as well as interested and affected parties. This was important because without their buy in, the NWG would not succeed. The NWG realized that they could not carry out this function on their own and they had to establish Provincial Working Groups (PWGs), one per province under the chairpersonship of DOL. This was successfully done and today all the provinces have a fully functional PWG, which have been tasked to:
• Help the NWG implement the NPES.
• Evaluate the success of the NPES in its province.
• Report to the NWG on the progress made quarterly.
• Communicate any new development to the NWG with a view to include that development in the NPES, by so doing updating the NPES.
• Liaise with the NWG on any matter they may deem necessary.

WHAT THE NWG DID WHILE DEVELOPING THE NPES
The first thing was to develop a work-plan that guided the activities of the NWG until the end of June 2004. According to that work-plan the NPES was to be developed together with other material such as brochures and posters.

The NWG also realized that the NPES would be a new concept for many inspectors within DOL. As such it identified 20 inspectors with environmental health and / or chemistry background and they were sent for two weeks training at the University of Cape Town. In that training they covered wide ranging occupational hygiene topics
including silica exposure, silicosis and dust control in industry. Visits were organized to factories, handling, manufacturing and producing silica as part of their practical training. They were also given tasks that they had to complete after the course, which gave them exposure to what to expect later on when they started with silica related inspections.

Once the campaign materials for the NPES were ready, inspectors trained and confident, the NWG organized the launch on 28 June 2004 by the Minister of Labour, the honorable Minister Shepherd Membathisi Mphumzi Mdladlana. The NPES was launched at Caesars Gauteng and more than 300 people from all walks of life including trade union movements attended.

**Future plans of the NWG**

The DOL has purchased Dust Monitoring Instruments which will be distributed to the provinces. The NWG is organizing training on the use of the dust monitoring instruments for those inspectors who attended the initial training on silica exposure and silicosis. Thereafter the training will be taken to all the provincial offices of the DOL to make sure that all IES inspectors are trained.

As already discussed, the NWG still needs to develop a CP which will reflect the state of the nation as far as exposure to silica is concerned. That work is very urgent and the NWG is going to do all it can to make sure that in 2006 a CP is available.

Finally, the NWG is planning and organizing the next National Workshop on the Elimination of Silicosis which will be held in July 2006. The emphasis will be on dust prevention, measurement and control. The idea is to help industry to see the need to prevent dust generation and to control it where necessary.

**Reference**