

3 Minute interview with Gwilym Howes – IMIU Principal Risk Engineer

Q. What are the main challenges inherent in mining operations?

Many things but in Mining specifically, the fact is that the working place changes every time you blast (daily) so there are ever changing challenges. The conditions are harsh.

Q. What gives you job satisfaction?

Opening people's eyes to things they have never 'seen' before. Being open and honest to build good working relationships with clients so that progress is achieved.

Q. When you arrive at a mining operation and begin the site survey – what is the first thing you assess?

I really like a general look around first, to understand how the parts of the operation all fit together. I hate to get entrenched into the detail before I understand the big picture.

Q. What is the most adventurous thing you have ever done?

Hard to say. I have done a lot of things which, by my standards are adventurous, like motorcycle touring in the Alps; learning to fly; and deep level mining for 16 years, but no, nothing earth shattering like climbing Everest or going to the moon.

Q. You have presented a number of papers at various conferences. In 2005, you spoke on 'Risk Management in Mining Projects' at the International Mining Industry Indaba in Cape Town. How was your presentation received?

Very well. It generated a lot of new work. People realised that although they thought they were managing risk in their projects they were actually only managing certain types of risk, but not the type of risk that was of specific interest to property underwriters. This is where we were able to add value and save them a lot of money later in terms of retrofits.

Q. What kind of Risk Engineer are you?

I am lucky that my 16 years experience of deep level gold and platinum mining (mainly in supervision and management of production) has afforded me a key understanding of the unique challenges inherent in mining operations. As such, I tend to favour the 'big picture' strategy in identifying risk, and in formulating mitigating measures that are both innovative and multifaceted. I think strategies have to be practicable, but I also like to challenge local 'norms' and 'accepted practices'.

Q. You once served as a member of a mine's rescue (proto) team. In your opinion, what makes a good rescue team?

Team spirit, discipline, good selection and training plus meticulous maintenance of equipment.

Q. What are the benefits of IMIU's Mining Risk Assessment Model (MinRAM) to clients? With your background in insurance – how does this model differ to others?

It is probably the most comprehensive in the industry. The fact is that people like a quantitative measure. In truth, a qualitative assessment is often necessary but people want to reduce a lot of information into just 2 numbers and the MinRAM does that for them. It allows them to benchmark their operations against their peers.

Q. What is the worst accident you have come across in your career? What was the cause and what could have prevented it?

There have been so many but I guess for me the worst would have to be the mass gassing at Kinross, and the cage down the shaft at Vaal Reefs. In both cases, these have led to improved safety standards, although we would be naive to say that they will never happen against. Fatalities in any industry are unacceptable and no less so than in the mining industry and it is to the credit of many of our clients that they are making such enormous efforts to eliminate these events.

Q. You travel a lot and get to experience lots of different sorts of cuisine – what is your favourite foodstuff? Can you cook?

I am too serious about eating to waste time cooking. They say a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled, so I share my eating experience by letting someone else cook. My favourite food? I like German and Italian. Good coffee and salami are high on the list. I also like hot spicy food, so Indian and Chinese, especially Szechuan. On a hot day sushi and ceviche gets a big nod. ... Did I say I like salami?

Q. What is your idea of a wonderful holiday?

Snow in an English speaking country. Motorcycling in the mountains with lots of hairpins.

Q. Have you got any unfulfilled ambitions?

Nothing left unfulfilled really. But there is a lot I would like to do again!