

Thursday, 21st November, 2019

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

GASSING INCIDENT AT NCHANGA SMELTER IN CHINGOLA

BY

**THE HON. MINISTER OF MINES AND MINERALS DEVELOPMENT, MR MUSUKWA,
MP**

Mr Speaker, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to inform this august House and the nation at large on the gassing incident that happened at Konkola Copper Mines Plc (KCM), Nchanga Smelter in Chingola, which affected 269 people.

Sir, the gassing incident occurred on Thursday, 14th November, 2019 from 2200 hours to 0800 hours on Friday, 15th November, 2019 at the sculpture burning plant of KCM's Nchanga Smelter in Chingola. The incident occurred simultaneously. This incident was caused by a power surge. According to the preliminary investigations, the plant had undergone some repairs in the morning of 14th November, 2019 on the sculpture burner, heat exchanger number two and part of the gas converter with the intention of sealing the gas leaks which were noticed earlier on.

Mr Speaker, after the plant was repaired, it was restarted. However, before temperatures could be raised to reach the required operating conditions, there was a power surge which tripped the starter blower and resulted in the process disturbance before critical operating parameters had been initialised. The power surge occurred at 1825 hours and at 1835 hours, operations were restarted, but the temperatures in the converter had already dropped. These decreased temperatures affected the conversion rate for sculpture dioxide to sculpture trioxide and thus, resulted in the prolonged escape of sculpture dioxide gas through the stack in the atmosphere. The escaped gasses descended to the ground level due to the high humidity, affecting about 269 people in the area. Among them were eleven KCM employees, fifty-two KCM contractors and 232 pupils from Nchanga Trust School, thirty-seven of whom were in Grade 12 and one member from of the community. The affected people were rushed to the mine hospital at Nchanga South where they were examined and their conditions confirmed stable by 1600 hours on 15th November, 2019.

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Sir, in order to avoid the reoccurrence of a similar incident, my ministry had instituted the following intervention measures:

- (a) operations at the plant have been suspended with immediate effect and plant units switched off until full investigations by all concerned stakeholders are completed and remedial measures are put in place;
- (b) the KCM has been instructed to provide a stable supply of power during the starting period in order to prevent the disruptions; and
- (c) the KCM has been instructed to improve the converter efficiency in order to reduce the time required for the stability in operations during the plant starting period.

Mr Speaker, the House may wish to know that the plant will only be recommissioned after all leakages are sealed and repairs completed and certified by mines safety inspectors and the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA). These measures have been taken in the interest of the safety of our people in and around the mining area in Chingola as well as the interest of environmental protection. Accidents in the process of mining are undesirable because they are a cost to both the Government and the company and they have a negative impact on the environment. In this regard, the Government will ensure that mining companies subscribe to the most compressive and robust safety standards accepted globally.

Sir, finally, I wish to call for maximum adherence to safety standards and protocols by all mining houses. The Government will continue propagating for proactiveness by the mines in a bid to avoid accidents. Accidents can really be avoided.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.