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Cleaner, Greener The Afrisam Way

AfriSam has long led the charge in the cement sector for a cleaner environment, and continues to develop and conduct a range of initiatives to maintain the momentum toward a greener planet.

This has a special significance as South Africa is among the world's largest and fastest growing carbon emitters, according to Nivashni Govender, environmental specialist at AfriSam.

"The country is one of the top ten CO₂ emitters in the world, when measured per capita," says Govender. "This places a huge responsibility on the cement manufacturing sector to be proactive, as South Africa has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020."

Having established its own environmental department as early as 1992, and developed an environmental policy just two years later, AfriSam has gone on to innovate a number of air quality management improvements. Upgrades in cement kilns and emission filters have led to the lowest dust emissions in Africa.

"Our ongoing focus on alternative fuels and resources (AFRs) has allowed us to steadily reduce the amount of coal burnt in our cement kilns, which in turn contributes to lower CO₂ emissions," she says. "For instance, we have developed a way of burning old tyres in our Dudfield plant – a strategy that also contributes significantly to addressing the environmental hazards posed by tyres when they are disposed of in landfill."

Energy conservation is an ongoing programme, which has included the progressive installation of energy efficient lighting across the company's range of cement, readymix and aggregate quarry facilities. As water scarcity becomes a more pressing issue for countries like South Africa, water conservation has also featured high on AfriSam's environmental agenda, says Govender.

“Our programmes focus on reducing the amount of water per tonne of cement produced, or per tonne of readymix prepared,” she says. “Our readymix plants, for instance, have strict re-use and recycling processes, and must recycle at least 50% of their grey water generated, on-site.”

The focus extends to the treatment of waste generally at all operations, where the waste stream of products like used oil, conveyor belts and pallets must be recycled to a large extent, and waste must be segregated on site to allow for more environmentally friendly disposal. Disposal to landfill is the last option.

“Rehabilitation and biodiversity at our quarry sites is also a priority, and as early as 1986 AfriSam formed the first trust of its kind specifically to cater for rehabilitation costs on closure – even before this was a legislated requirement for mines,” she says. “Our current strategy of concurrent rehabilitation – in which we conduct rehabilitation as we mine rather than waiting for closure before we start – has proved very effective both from an environmental and ecological perspective, as well as a cost perspective.”

AfriSam’s focus on biodiversity involves detailed and ongoing research to measure the environmental impact of operations on species of flora and fauna, and steps to protect and foster biodiversity where necessary, especially where species are protected by law or endangered.

“Environmental protection also has implications when it comes to aspects of cultural heritage, which we take very seriously,” says Govender. “We initiated a process several years ago to conserve an area of underground caves on our property near Sterkfontein in Gauteng – part of a World Heritage Site; working with partners at the University of the Witwatersrand. We are handing over this valuable national treasure for scientific and public use, while continuing to support its maintenance.”

ENVIRO PIC 01 : To mine limestone in the ecologically sensitive Saldanha Vredenburg area, AfriSam is placing more than 150 ha of this property into environmental status.

ENVIRO PIC 02 : Believed to an industry first, AfriSam has introduced Biodiversity Management Plans at all its mining operations.

ENVIRO PIC 03 : As far back as 2000, AfriSam introduced Project Green Cement to actively reduce its CO2 emissions.

ENVIRO PIC 04 : Nivashni Govender is AfriSam's Environmental Specialist.

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