

# Adapting mandatory training to the digital age is critical to ensuring ongoing mine safety in the pandemic

By [Jacques Farmer](#)

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Ongoing training is critical to ensuring the health and safety of all workers in a mining environment. However, with the Covid-19 pandemic requiring social distancing and reduced in-person interaction, this has become something of a challenge. While some organisations have extended the validity period of existing qualifications to reduce the burden around training, the reality is that this could put everyone at risk. Mandatory training must still take place to ensure everyone is up to date and on the same page with regard to safety, but training methods need to be adapted to the current environment. Digital transformation is the key to ensuring ongoing health and safety in mining.



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## A hazardous space

Mining is one of the most hazardous working environments, and as such is governed by many laws that require training around health and safety. This takes many forms, including hygiene, HIV awareness and, more recently, Covid-19, as well as hazard identification, risk assessment, incident assessment, standard operating procedure, baseline risk assessment, environmental awareness and more.

There is also training around mining-specific equipment and processes, and aspects such as working at heights, working in confined spaces and working with chemical substances. All of these areas require ongoing training to ensure that all workers maintain the highest levels of awareness and safety.

## The Covid problem

Training has traditionally been done in person, in training centres specifically for this purpose, as well as on the equipment itself with a supervisor. With Covid, this ability has been severely limited, as the need for social distancing and limits on the number of people permitted in classrooms makes training challenging. In addition, the regular daily safety discussions are limited due to social distance requirements. Expired certificates mean that training is no longer current, which is dangerous in such a hazardous space. In-person discussions now need to take place virtually, which limits engagement and discussion.

Without the ability to get groups together for safety discussions, much of the conversation takes place on a one to one basis, but this is time consuming and does not ensure that everyone knows everything they need to. The upshot of this is a decrease in safety and an increase in risk. To maintain the necessary standards for safety in mining, it is vital to find innovative ways of offering the required training, without face to face contact.

## **Technology to the fore**

Innovative technology offers the solution to these challenges, while simultaneously improving efficiency and effectiveness. For example, one of the issues with the daily safety briefing is ensuring that everyone receives and understands the message. In addition, things might change during the day, but this cannot necessarily be communicated to all relevant parties easily. Using tools like WhatsApp to send out news bulletins with brief, pertinent messages can help to keep everyone informed at all times.

Ongoing training also needs to be adapted to ensure the highest levels of safety in mines, and there are some benefits to this. Smaller groups may be more time consuming, but they also allow for better interaction and improved learning. In addition, training providers can bring in leading-edge technology like simulations and virtual reality. These enable training to be executed remotely, as needed.

## **A blended approach**

Innovation is key when it comes to delivering training initiatives. It is essential to focus on the right level and quality of training to make it relevant, rather than taking a blanket approach which has become impossible in a post-pandemic world. While classroom availability remains a challenge, more proactive planning and targeted training initiatives can assist in the effective delivery of interventions.

Going forward, it is essential to develop a blended approach of simulation training and traditional classroom interventions, and leverage existing tools to improve communication and engagement. It is also important to be more proactive about applying health and safety training initiatives, to ensure current needs are addressed and training is customised according to organisational strategy. Ultimately, there is no one size fits all approach, so mines must work with training partners to deliver effective training now, and in the future.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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