

Media statement

False and misleading allegations published in The Namibian on 19 May 2021, headlined “Rössing’s sick and toxic legacy”

In response to the false allegations printed in The Namibian newspaper dated 19 May 2021, Rössing Uranium Limited would like to issue the following statement to the media and to the public.

The article, which claims that some former workers have been left with life-long illnesses due to exposure from radiation at the mine is viewed with the intention of causing fear, confusion and worry amongst our current and former employees as well as the public.

Nothing is more important to Rössing than the health and safety of our employees. Further to similar claims from both Earthlife and some former employees, the University of Manchester (UoM) was appointed in 2015 by Rio Tinto (Rössing’s former majority shareholder) to conduct an independent epidemiological study to investigate if working at the Rössing mine is linked with a higher risk of developing cancer. The study was completed in 2019 and the findings were shared with various key stakeholders and released publicly on Rössing’s website in January 2021. This followed delays in holding stakeholder briefings due to Covid 19.

The University of Manchester research team identified 7901 people who had worked at least one year at the mine between 1976 and 2010. They identified those who had developed cancer using the Namibia National Cancer Registry, the South African National Cancer Registry and information from the records of the mine’s occupational health service. These worker records were carefully linked to cancer registry records, maintaining strict confidentiality. Rössing does not have access to information of individual cases because employee medical records are confidential, therefore compensation for workers claiming occupational diseases are determined following a process of individual case evaluation under the relevant legal and technical frameworks.

This was the most comprehensive study of this nature done in the history of Rössing’s existence, performed on a case-cohort basis to ensure a statistically sound conclusion is reached.

Given the low grade uranium mined at Rössing, the study found that exposure for employees is significantly lower than that found in underground uranium mining operations elsewhere in the world and that the exposure at the Rössing mine is only marginally higher than the level experienced in the surrounding habitat (i.e. background radiation experienced in the Erongo region).

The final conclusion of the study conducted by the University of Manchester found that **there is no strong evidence that total radiation exposure, or other exposures at the Rössing mine, have caused an increased risk of cancers in the workforce.**

Rössing has a Radiation Management Plan (RMP) which is guided by the Atomic Energy and Radiation Protection Act, 2005 (Act No. 5 of 2005) and as such Rössing has adopted the system of dose limitation recommended by the International Commission for Radiological Protection (ICRP 2007). The National Radiation Protection Agency (NRPA) is instrumental in ensuring that Rössing remains in compliance with its RMP and the ICRP requirements, as per commitment.

Furthermore:

- Audits on radiation management are conducted from time to time by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, NRPA.
- Local procedures and rules are detailed in the relevant workplace procedures and work instructions.
- In order to more effectively and consistently regulate occupational exposure to ionising radiation, workplaces are designated as either ‘controlled’ or ‘supervised’ areas, or as ‘non-classified’ if no additional control is required.
- Controlled areas are fenced wherever possible, signposted with warning signs, entry gates to the areas are locked and access is restricted.
- For supervised areas, access is restricted by local departmental standard procedures.

All these systems are in place to ensure that we live up to our safety philosophy of zero harm. Making sure that at the end of each shift, our employees leave the workplace in the same condition they entered the mine.

There has been a disregard for the truth in the portrayal of Rössing Uranium and a total misrepresentation of the 45 years legacy it has built for its employees, communities and the national impact the mine continues to have in Namibia. The mines long held legacy in which it prides itself in maintaining the health and safety of employees as the number one priority, has been tarnished by this sensational article. Rössing’s commitment to safety is further cemented by the consecutive wins it has enjoyed through the Chamber of Mines Inter-mines safety awards.

The false accusation that there is “secrecy in publishing the full report” or “keeping information away” from former employees is unfounded. Following the required approval by the Ministry of Health and Social Services to release the study findings, Rössing Uranium, Rio Tinto and the University of Manchester embarked on a week-long feedback engagement programme which included stakeholders such as employees, media, key ministries, Namibian Uranium Association, regional municipalities and Earthlife and others. The sessions included an opportunity for stakeholders to pose burning questions and concerns and follow up feedback platforms were also availed.

The statement made in the article of “used for making bombs...for the British and the United States military” is not only damaging to the company, but also to Namibia as a country, when all uranium exported from Namibia may strictly only be used for peaceful purposes, such as power generation. Sensational news, carried out without any regard to the institutions and the people they will affect is damaging to institutional legacies built over the years.

We wish to highlight the fact that although the study findings have been approved for release, there is a final step in the process before the full study report can be released publically. The University of Manchester is in the process of drafting the manuscript for peer review and submission to a scientific journal, following which approval needs to be sought from the Ministry of Health and Social Services before the full report is published. This is a key requirement from the Ministry of Health and Social Services who gave the initial approval for the study to commence.

The University’s focus is on completing the final step as early as possible, however as with any independent peer-review process it is difficult to dictate the timeline. In the meantime, the full report cannot be circulated until publication of the peer-reviewed article.

We will continue to remain transparent and open about the study and its findings, as well as the release of the full report following the peer review process as well as the required approval being granted by the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

For more information please feel free to visit our website (www.rossing.com) via the link (<https://rossing.com/reports-research.htm>) where you will find the presentation of the study findings, media release, lay summary and frequently asked questions and answers.

You are welcome to contact us should you require further information, clarity or have any questions related to the study findings.

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