



Anglo 'ignored' ill miners

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Lawyers suing Anglo American SA for compensation for 18 miners suffering from silicosis want to confront the mining giant in court.



SUING: Wilson Mafolwana, 62, has silicosis after 23 years on a Free State mine Picture: DANIEL BORN



A day ahead of the AGM of the South African company's parent, Anglo American plc, in London, lawyers held a press briefing in Johannesburg at which they alleged that Anglo American SA ignored the health of its miners, some of whom are exposed to more than four times the internationally accepted levels of silica dust.

Four of the 18 former miners the lawyers represent have died since the litigation began in 2004.

Two of them, Tseliso Nkete and Moses Semakale, had died since December, said London attorney Richard Meeran .

Wilson Mafolwana, 62, is one of the remaining 14 suffering from the respiratory disease silicosis, allegedly contracted while he was working for 23 years at the President Steyn gold mine, in the Free State.

"My chest is too tight," said Mafolwana yesterday. He was short of breath and coughing.

An independent study in 2008 found that a quarter of the miners at President Steyn had the respiratory disease, which can result in heart failure and death.

"From the moment you go down in the cage, they rarely ever watered down the place - it was very, very dusty," said Mafolwana.

The lawyers were not able to give the amounts the former miners were claiming but said one of the highest claims, for injuries and lost earnings, was about R3-million.

At last year's Anglo American plc AGM, a former miner with silicosis, Alpheus Blom, told Anglo chairman Sir John Parker that he had "received no help from Anglo American SA, a company you own".

Describing the conditions in the mine, Blom said: "We asked for masks but I and other miners were never given masks. Instead we'd make our own masks by stealing bandages."