

Thousands of plaintiffs in silicosis class action

Reuters Africa reports that Richard Spoor, a South African lawyer, said he was preparing a class action lawsuit against leading gold mining firms on behalf of thousands of former miners who say they contracted silicosis, a debilitating lung disease, through negligent health and safety.

Spoor, whose legal battle against a South African asbestos-mining company led to a \$100 million settlement in 2003, said he would file class action papers with the High Court in Johannesburg "within the next few months".

Spoor told Reuters the principal targets of the suit would be AngloGold Ashanti, Gold Fields and Harmony Gold - South Africa's three biggest gold miners - and minor producer DRD Gold. Spoor said he had so far signed up 6,876 plaintiffs from South Africa and Lesotho, the landlocked kingdom that has provided hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to South Africa's gold mines over the last century.

Frans Barker, chief operating officer of the Chamber of Mines and the main industry spokesman on silicosis, declined specific comment. "We're continuing with our work on these issues, irrespective of the class action. We wouldn't like to respond to the class action itself because that depends very much on the merit of specific cases," he said.

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