

Local hero

Kingsgate Consolidated proves that focusing on the welfare of local employees can be as valuable as the gold it mines.

Profile by BELINDA MEARES



An outstanding commitment to the wellbeing and development of its indigenous workforce has won Kingsgate Consolidated Limited (KCN) the Special Award for Labour Relations.

This small Australian mining company operates the Chatree gold mine, 280 km north of Bangkok, Thailand, through its local subsidiary, Akara Mining. From the outset of production in late 2001, Chatree has earned best-practice credentials by integrating sustainability standards throughout all aspects of its business.

This includes ensuring the health, safety and education of its employees, and maintaining a responsive and supportive relationship with the wider community.

Chatree claims to be the world's safest gold mine, having recorded 1750 consecutive days of mine operations without a lost time incident. This result is achieved through a rigorous safety management system to which all contractors as well as staff are inducted, with re-induction on an annual basis.

Contributing to the safety of the mine's operations is drug and alcohol testing, and an emergency response unit that includes representatives from all areas of the site. The company also has an extensive monitoring program that tests noise, vibration and air quality effects on employees and the surrounding communities.

This year, Kingsgate became the world's first stand-alone mining company to gain accreditation for the Social Accountability International's SA8000 standard. SAI is an international NGO that promotes humane workplaces, based on the principles established by the International Labour Organisation and UN Declaration of Human Rights. For a gold-mining company to achieve SA8000 indicates that all aspects of its operations are ethical and that it has not lowered its standards when operating in a

developing country.

Kingsgate prides itself on "open door" management style, and a fair and consistent approach to managing its employees. As an equal opportunities employer, Chatree's combined mining and exploration departments support a workforce that is 99 per cent Thai and, it is believed, the highest proportion of women managers of any mine operating in Asia. More than 80 per cent of the site's workers are drawn from local communities and have been trained from scratch in modern mining methods.

The company's ethos is that staff development is an investment, not a cost. Its Educational Assistance Policy encourages employees to take job-related university and technical courses to develop their skills, productivity and potential for promotion. To date, 22 employees have enrolled in Masters degrees, with one employee pursuing an Australian doctorate.

Kingsgate also invests in education in Chatree's nearby villages. As part of its partnership efforts with the community, it has funded the building of new schools and provided educational programs, supplies and scholarships. The Thai government holds Kingsgate/Akara in high regard as a responsible mining company, and has granted it several national awards for its achievements.

Stephen Promnitz, Kingsgate's Corporate Development Manager, says to win an Australian Sustainability Award holds extra significance for the company.

'We're ecstatic to receive this recognition from an independent body. We're a small company without a large department to look after sustainability. Yet CSR is such a core part of our business. It means more than just a licence to operate. We've built it into the KPIs of everyone in the workplace so it's bottom-up driven. It's Thai people picking up the ball. 

