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Coal reserves dwindle

By Martin Kadzere

HWANGE Colliery Company Limited's coal reserves suitable for electricity generation from the dragline pits will be exhausted in the next three years.

While estimates indicate the colliery's reserves for power coal lasts for 15 years, HCCL managing director Mr Fred Moyo said there were huge deposits on the Colliery Old Number 3.

The reserves are however under water.

Although the mine was looking at ways of dewatering the mine, the HCCL boss pointed out that the process was capital intensive and "the success is not guaranteed".

Hwange Colliery deposits are into two categories, the shallow reserves extracted by the dragline and dip reserves which are mined using underground methods which are costly.

The recently commissioned dragline at Hwange has a lifespan of about 50 years and the reserve scenario does not support such an asset's life.

"Coal suitable for power generation is found in shallow reserves and our own resources from the dragline pits do not go beyond three years," said Mr Moyo.

"While we have some reserves at Old Number 3 Colliery, the deposits are under water and we still need to look for ways to dewater the mine without polluting the surrounding rivers.

This now raises fears of a major power crisis if HCCL eventually runs out of power coal reserves from the dragline pits and if not issued with new power coal claims.

Equally confounding would be the fate of the Hwange Power Station, as lower reserves would be insufficient to support the current and envisaged Zimbabwe Power Company expansion project. ZPC, a subsidiary of Zesa Holdings which plans to build two more power generation units in Hwange and these will demand more coal.

Mr Moyo however said that they had discovered that there were more quantities of industrial coal under the company's current operations.

"While we are running out of power coal deposits, we still have substantial quantities of industrial coal which cannot be used for power generation."

ZPC has not been generating enough power at Hwange Power Station, the country's oldest electricity power generation plant largely as a result of coal shortages.

Mr Moyo said coal deliveries to HPS have drastically improved during the recent months. Monthly deliveries are averaging 180 000 tonnes and are expected to rise to 200 000 tonnes next month.

"Zesa is paying us in advance and they are running their four units.

"At least we are now managing to build up stock piles. We are no longer living from hand to mouth which I think is a very positive development."

At this time last year, HCCL was supplying only 100 000 tonnes per month.

The HCCL boss said the conveyor belt which carries coal from the crushers to the power station would be replaced at an estimated cost of R4 million.