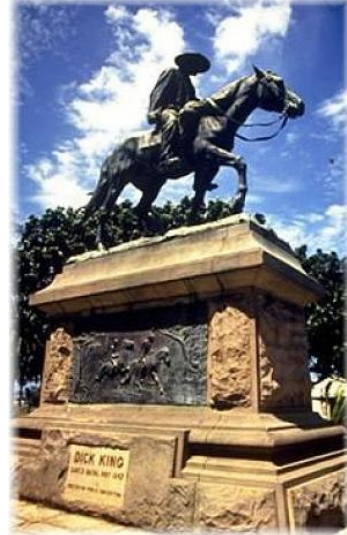


## ***Official opening of the XV SAFEX International Congress***

Every country has its national heroes. In South Africa, where I come from, Dick King is one such hero. In the early hours of 25 May 1842, Dick King and his 16-year-old companion, Ndongeni, slipped across the water of Durban Bay with their horses. It was the only way out of Durban which was besieged by the Boers fighting the British in Natal at the time. Once Dick King got across the bay, he raced towards Grahamstown to obtain reinforcements and supplies for the British garrison in Durban. Dick King crossed nearly 1000 km of wild country, with 122 rivers and streams. He reached Grahamstown in ten days and reinforcements were hastily shipped from Port Elizabeth. On 26 June the siege was broken and a grateful Durban erected a monument to honour Dick and Ndongeni.



You may ask what this has to do with this the XV SAFEX Conference. It demonstrates, I believe, some of the important challenges we face if we are to have a successful Congress. The story of Dick King has three lessons for us:

- It features a messenger with a mission
- An important message that inspired the journey
- An impact on others resulting in action.

The similarities for us are obvious. We, the delegates are the messengers at this Congress. Each one of us has important information to share about our experiences in our companies. The messages we convey in this way help others to learn from us and take appropriate action to prevent similar incidents from occurring.

### **The Messenger**

Without the messenger there can be no message and others will be unable to learn or take action. Without your active involvement in the Congress there will be nothing for us to learn and there will be no improvement in the explosives industry's safety, health and environmental (SHE) incident record. We are dependent on each other in this respect. Dick King conveyed accurate information about the situation in Durban to the authorities at Grahamstown. He was committed to sharing the information he had in order to help others. This required special qualities and courage. The challenge we face is whether we are committed enough to helping others learn from our experiences. Those experiences could be similar or different to those of other companies. Both these situations are important for our learning. Similar experiences emphasise the importance of an issue. Different experiences don't negate other experiences but highlight that there is something we don't fully understand. The more experiences we share the better our understanding of the issues. It also means we are in a better position to take effective action that addresses the true causes of a problem situation. Without willing and committed messengers there can be no message.

### **The Message**

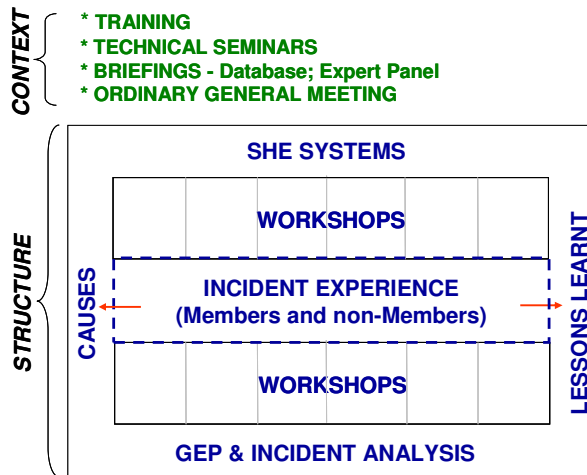
The Congress has a specific context and structure within which to package our messages.

The context is provided by some of the ancillary activities that take place before and during the plenary sessions. These ancillary activities are as important as the papers presented during the plenary sessions. An intensive two-day training course on the technical aspects of incident investigation commenced on Tuesday. During the course the participants became aware of the importance of the evidence left by an explosion and how to approach such evidence. The techniques they were taught are vital in trying to establish the immediate causes of an incident. Two technical seminars took place on the day before Congress. During these

seminars, which covered explosive pump safety and nitro-glycerine remediation, specialist groups started a process of documenting our current state of knowledge and accumulating best practices in these fields. Once again the objective is aimed at minimising risks and preventing incidents in these fields. During the plenary sessions we will be briefing delegates on two important services SAFEX offers. These concern enhancements to the incident database and the establishment of a panel of experts that could support members who need to access specific expertise.

The structure for the plenary sessions revolves around the two Congress themes: SHE Systems and Good Explosives Practice (GEP). The GEP is extracted from analysis of specific incidents. Both themes are introduced by papers in plenary followed by simultaneous workshops on each theme.

During the workshops participants share in depth their experiences based on the outlines provided by the plenary papers. On the second day the plenary papers focus on reviewing the incidents members have had. Here our associate members share any information they have of incidents by non-members. The workshops and incident reviews are aimed at identifying causes of incidents and lessons learnt. These help us identify new issues we should deal with by way of future Congress themes.



The diagram depicts the message framework.

## The Impact

Our participation at this Congress is a privilege which brings with it a responsibility. This is a three-fold responsibility:

1. There is the responsibility to Congress to be the courageous messengers of our company's experiences we have spoken about.
2. Our second responsibility is to our companies to identify learning experiences which we can take home and see that it results in effective action.
3. The final responsibility is to SAFEX and fellow members. It concerns our ongoing involvement between now and the next Congress. If SAFEX is going to help members improve their SHE performance, it must receive good quality and reliable information about experiences as they occur. Congresses merely provide us the opportunity of analysing and discussing those incidents. If you can continually motivate your company to report incidents thoroughly and on time as well as respond to SAFEX with your suggestions and issues, we will be able to serve you and all our members better.

May this Congress be a rewarding experience for you all. SAFEX's sincere wish is that the explosives industry will be safer, healthier and environmentally friendlier as a result of it.

It is now my privilege to declare the XV SAFEX International Congress officially open.

J E (Boet) Coetzee  
Chairman