

## **Operational excellence, innovation and tools for KATCO future successes**

*Gerard Olivier Fries, KATCO, Almaty, Kazakhstan*

In less than 15 years, KATCO (AREVA Mines 51%, Kazatomprom 49%) has become one of the largest uranium mines in the world with a yearly production level of 4,000 t U. This remarkable success story results from a combination of multiple factors:

- The location in Kazakhstan which holds the 2nd largest reserves in the world; the KATCO deposit is of world class;
- The In Situ Recovery (ISR) technology used for its production is robust and efficient, with the world's lowest cost of production;
- A long-term partnership built on a combination of French know-how and Kazatomprom's long standing experience in ISR technology.

KATCO future production will come from the new reserves discovered by its exploration team and is expected to last the coming decades. To ensure a successful future, KATCO is relying on several tools:

- Safety-first as the foundation, putting the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issues as the top priority of all our improvement processes;
- Operational excellence and its various concepts (the "excellent company", Gemba Kaizen, the excellent management, visual management, problem solving, manager in the field, continuous improvement, standardization of processes, etc.);
- Incremental innovation, allowing the teams to contribute to a safe and sustainable production. The main tool for innovation is the KATCO Master Plan with a portfolio of short-term (3 to 12 months) actions which are monitored on a monthly basis;
- For the longer term, KATCO has a portfolio of R & D projects, carried out in partnership with both AREVA Mines and Kazatomprom, in order to further decrease the cost of production.

Technological breakthroughs are expected, notably by the transfer of know-how coming from the oil & gas industry, such as the Nuclear Magnetic Resonance logging tool, 3D modelling and reservoir simulation for the prevision of production, horizontal drilling, etc. Using the best of both cultures, the French and the Kazakhstanis, KATCO is building its future step by step, in the middle of the steppe.