

Survey shows women offer solution to mining's HR shortage

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Women could be part of the solution to the problem of the mining industry's coming 60,000-person shortage by 2015, said MaryAnn Mihychuk, president of Women in Mining (WIM) Canada, to a 600+ gathering of the women's advocacy organization, held on Tuesday during the PDAC's International Convention.

Women currently hold just 14.4% of the jobs in mining and exploration in Canada, according to the results of a survey released during the event.

At that level, the representation of women in the industry is the lowest of all the primary industry categories in Canada. The level has been rising over the last decade but the presence of women in the industry is still far below the overall Canadian labour force average of 47.4%.

"We can be part of the solution in the upcoming skills shortage crisis that the industry is facing. We can help," Mihychuk said.

Studies suggest that the mining industry in this country will face a serious human resources problem in coming years as a significant portion of workers retires or leave the industry while younger people are not well aware of the benefits of a geoscience career.

"The survey found that women are highly skilled and they are willing and able to do the work that's needed. They're willing to work underground, to go into the field and around the world." Mihychuk said. "They're fully capable of meeting these challenges."

But there are challenges to a career in mining according to the survey's findings. Work culture was the challenge most frequently cited by female survey respondents (15.8% of respondents), followed by lack of mentors and support network (13.0%). Perception of the industry was cited by 9.9% of respondents.

But employers surveyed identified fewer and different work challenges for women. They cited lack of mentors and support network as the leading challenge (cited by 7.5% of employer respondents). Work culture and lack of professional career development were both cited as the second most important factor by 4.5% of employers.

"How can they solve the problem until they recognize there is a problem?" said Mihychuk, a geologist with 25 years of experience in the industry.

Women were more likely to report barriers to career advancement if they worked in a fly-in-fly-out arrangement.

As one woman in the survey said: “Working at a northern mine site, the majority of women are not able to work on a seven-day-in, seven-day-out schedule once they have children. The camp is set up to accommodate men as they make up 90% of the employees at the site. The isolated conditions, the lack of female co-workers and the inflexibility of travel make work at site for me, personally, mentally difficult.”

Women in Mining has branches across Canada and around the world.

The study, called *Ramp-UP: A study on the status of women in Canada’s mining and exploration sector*, is available at www.wimcanada.org and was commissioned with the financial support of a variety of organizations, including the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada.

The results will be used as a benchmark for measuring future performance.

On another subject, Mihychuk said she’s delighted that the organization has a contact list that includes 750 women and 1,200 men.

“Isn’t that great,” she said. “Those men are the ones I’d like to be working with.”