

## SHAFT SINKING

# Russian Foray

Local company clinches R2bn contract at one of the world's biggest potash mines

**S**outh African mining contractor Shaft Sinkers has landed its first multibillion-rand contract in the Russian Federation.

The contract, valued at \$271-million (more than R2-billion) is for the construction of a man-and-materials shaft at one of the world's biggest potash deposits, at Gremyachinskoye mine, at Kotelnikovo, about 100 km from the Volgograd region of Russia.

Shaft Sinkers MD **Rob Schroder** says: "This contact is extremely important to the local region of Kotelnikovo as well as the greater Volgograd region and is part of our company's determination and strategy to secure and expand our international shaft-sinking operations, while also maintaining a

solid presence in South Africa."

Shaft Sinkers, which has been in the shaft-sinking business for more than 47 years and is one of the world's leading contractors in this field, will be sinking the shaft and sealing water by means of cementation and grouting, as opposed to the more traditional Russian ground freezing method.

Work on the site is due to begin in November and completion of the shaft is scheduled for January 2012.

The workforce will comprise a key group of South African expatriates of up to 50 people, who will employ and train local workers.

**JJ Durand**, manager of METS, the design and engineering, procurement and construction man-



**ROB SCHRODER**

Contract part of global expansion strategy

agement arm of the Shaft Sinkers group, says the project is highly challenging because of the extreme ground and weather conditions at Gremyachinskoye. The weather varies from winter, when temperatures drop to -22 °C, to summer, when they rocket to 32 °C. Shaft Sinkers has worked under similar conditions at a potash mine in Boulby, in the UK.

The challenges ahead are immense but each phase has been meticulously planned, says Durand.

He adds: "Because of the ground

conditions and the squeezing pressures found there, we will need to concrete-line the shaft and install 350 m of 'tubbing' constructed out of cast iron and geared to withstand squeezing ground pressures."

Another challenge will be to maintain an accident-free record throughout the operation.

EuroChem has been involved in the development of the Gremyachinskoye potash deposit for two years. It has already been proven that the deposit is unique with regard to the size of its potash resources – it is bigger than 1,2-billion tons, according to geological data – and the content of potassium chloride is up to 41%.

The total cost of the project is about \$2-billion. This is one of the largest investment projects by a private company in Russia.

After the commissioning of the Gremyachinskoye mine in 2012, EuroChem will become the first Russian company and the fourth in the world producing the entire range of mineral fertilisers: nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

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