

Reconfiguring mining compressed air networks for cost savings

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ABSTRACT

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The world is currently experiencing major issues in the energy sector. The ever-growing human population, limited energy resources and the effect of greenhouse gas emissions have become major global concerns for the energy sector, including the electricity generation sector. This dilemma caused electricity providers to revise their generation methods and created a major need for consumers to utilise electricity more efficiently. Demand side management (DSM) is one initiative developed for consumers to efficiently utilise electricity.

Due to their high electricity consumption and technical skills, mines are ideal targets for the implementation of DSM strategies. Therefore, the focus of this study was to investigate South African mines for possible implementation of DSM strategies on their compressed air networks. Compressed air networks at South African mines are relatively old and inadequately maintained. This causes inefficient distribution and use of compressed air. The study will therefore focus on reconfiguring mining compressed air networks for cost savings. Cost savings include financial savings on electricity bills, implementation costs and decreased maintenance.

Through several investigations, the possibility of implementing energy savings strategies to reconfigure the compressed air networks of two South African mines was identified. Reconfiguring the networks would respectively entail interconnecting two shafts and relocating a compressor from an abandoned shaft to a fully productive shaft.

Theoretical simulations were developed to determine the networks' responses to the reconfiguration strategies. The simulations assisted in exposing the viability of implementing the reconfiguration strategies on the respective compressed air networks. Positive responses were obtained from the simulations and proposals were made to the respective mines for possible implementation.

The proposed initiatives were implemented on the respective mines' compressed air networks. After implementation of the interconnection strategy, a consecutive three-month performance assessment period commenced to prove the viability of the proposed savings. An average power saving of 1 700 kW was achieved during the performance assessment period. The proposed initiative to relocate the compressor is currently being implemented.

A financial saving of approximately R8.9 million per annum was achieved by implementing the interconnection strategy. The large financial saving was due to the utilisation of the mine's salvaged equipment. Further savings were achieved by the decreased maintenance on the mine's compressors. Due to the successful implementation of the interconnection strategy, it is safe to state that cost savings can be achieved by reconfiguring mining compressed air networks.

Keywords: Energy sector, Electricity generation, Demand side management, South African mines, Compressed air networks, Reconfiguration, Cost savings, Interconnection, Relocation, Simulations, Performance assessment

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF SYMBOLS.....	x
LIST OF UNITS	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
LIST OF TERMS	xiii
 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	2
1.1 Energy consumption trends.....	2
1.2 Mining compressed air systems.....	8
1.3 DSM potential on compressed air networks.....	12
1.4 Problem statement.....	14
1.5 Outline of the study	14
 2 COMPRESSED AIR NETWORK APPLICATIONS IN THE MINING ENVIRONMENT	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Mining operations and compressed air requirements.....	17
2.3 Improving compressed air network efficiencies	19
2.4 Compressed air network fundamentals and calculations.....	25
2.5 Previously implemented DSM projects relevant to the study	37

2.6 Conclusion.....	47
3 RECONFIGURING MINING COMPRESSED AIR NETWORKS FOR COST SAVINGS	49
3.1 Introduction	49
3.2 Network analysis and constraints	49
3.3 Data processing and network operation	53
3.4 Reconfiguration strategy development	61
3.5 Conclusion.....	65
4 IMPLEMENTING RECONFIGURATION STRATEGIES ON SOUTH AFRICAN MINING COMPRESSED AIR NETWORKS	67
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Energy efficiency by repositioning a compressor	67
4.3 Energy efficiency by interconnecting two shafts.....	85
4.4 Implementation and results.....	107
4.5 Conclusion.....	115
5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	118
5.1 Summary.....	118
5.2 Future work and recommendations.....	121
6 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	123

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: World net electricity generation by fuel (2007 – 2035) [6]	3
Figure 2: Newly electrified South African households from 1994 to 2008 [12].....	4
Figure 3: Eskom's maximum supply capacity and maximum demand forecast [15]	5
Figure 4: Verified electricity savings through DSM initiatives [16]	6
Figure 5: Eskom's direct electricity sales for 2011/2012 [16].....	7
Figure 6: Stand-alone compressed air system.....	10
Figure 7: Complex compressed air system (compressed air network).....	10
Figure 8: Small modifications for compressed air energy savings.....	13
Figure 9: Typical centrifugal compressor at a South African gold mine.....	20
Figure 10: Basic layout of an automated compressor system [30], [38]	20
Figure 11: Installed equipment during automation procedures of mining compressors	21
Figure 12: Compressor motor power reduction by using VSDs [29], [40]	23
Figure 13: Surface control valve at a South African gold mine.....	24
Figure 14: Corrosion on the inside of an old compressed air pipeline	29
Figure 15: Increasing pressure losses with increased pipe wall roughness [22].....	29
Figure 16: Existing compressed air leaks in mining compressed air reticulation networks....	32
Figure 17: Increasing shaft column pressure with increasing shaft depth [37]	35
Figure 18: Effect of airflow demand on auto compression [37].....	36
Figure 19: Surface compressed air network layout of Mine A	38
Figure 20: Proposed compressed air network layout for Mine A	40
Figure 21: Effect of the DSM strategy on Mine A's compressor power consumption [41]	41
Figure 22: Surface compressed air network layout of Mine B	43
Figure 23: Proposed compressed air network layout for Mine B	46
Figure 24: Effect of the DSM strategy on Mine B's compressor power consumption [22]....	47
Figure 25: Three different sections identified in a compressed air network.....	50
Figure 26: Minimum and maximum pressure requirements of a compressed air network....	52
Figure 27: Minimum and maximum airflow requirements of a compressed air network.....	52
Figure 28: Illustration of identified data-measuring points in a compressed air network	54
Figure 29: Typical SCADA system used on a South African mine	55
Figure 30: Simplified illustration explaining the flow-balancing concept.....	55
Figure 31: Portable power monitor	56
Figure 32: Portable flow meter	57
Figure 33: Portable pressure logger	57

Figure 34: Typical flow profiles developed for a compressed air network.....	59
Figure 35: Identifying compressed air shortfall and wastage by developing flow profiles	59
Figure 36: Typical pressure profiles developed for a compressed air network	60
Figure 37: Pressure profile vs pressure requirements for a compressed air network	60
Figure 38: Weekday power profiles developed for compressed air networks (baselines)	61
Figure 39: Possible reconfiguration strategies on a compressed air network	62
Figure 40: Solution selection strategy to reconfigure a mining compressed air network	64
Figure 41: Schematic layout of Mine C's surface compressed air network.....	68
Figure 42: Effect of auto compression on the compressed air pressure at Mine C	70
Figure 43: Pressure loss from 3# to 4# over a normal working weekday	71
Figure 44: Mine C's minimum and maximum network pressure requirements	72
Figure 45: Mine C's minimum and maximum parameters for future developments	72
Figure 46: Simplified illustration of Mine C's data-measuring points	73
Figure 47: Flow balance between the mine's compressors and total network consumption .	74
Figure 48: Mine C's compressed air consumption trends	75
Figure 49: Mine C's surface compressed air pressure trends	76
Figure 50: Undersupply and compressed air wastage at 5#	77
Figure 51: Mine C's 5# compressors power consumption.....	78
Figure 52: Mine C's 3# compressor power consumption	78
Figure 53: Mine C total compressor power consumption (power baseline).....	79
Figure 54: Solution A - simplified layout to reconfigure Mine C's compressed air network ...	80
Figure 55: Simulation illustrating the effect of the 3# compressor relocation.....	82
Figure 56: Increased surface delivery pressure at 5# after relocating the 3# compressor...	82
Figure 57: Improved surface delivery against the network pressure requirement schedule .	83
Figure 58: Mine C compressor power required after relocating the 3# compressor	84
Figure 59: Proposed power profile against the power baseline	84
Figure 60: Schematic layout of Mine D's surface compressed air network.....	87
Figure 61: Effect of auto compression on the compressed air pressure at Mine D	90
Figure 62: Pressure loss from 1# to 3# over a normal working weekday	91
Figure 63: Mine D's minimum and maximum network pressure requirements	91
Figure 64: Simplified illustration of Mine D's data-measuring points	92
Figure 65: Flow balance between 1#'s compressors and air consumption at 1# and 3#....	93
Figure 66: Mine D's compressed air consumption trends.....	94
Figure 67: Mine D's surface compressed air pressure trends	95
Figure 68: Undersupply and compressed air wastage at 1#	96

Figure 69: Undersupply and compressed air wastage at 2#	96
Figure 70: Undersupply and compressed air wastage at 3#	97
Figure 71: Mine D's 1# compressors power consumption	98
Figure 72: Mine D's 2# compressor power consumption	98
Figure 73: Mine D total compressor power consumption (power baseline).....	99
Figure 74: Possible reconfiguration solutions for Mine D's compressed air network	100
Figure 75: Simulation model for proposed Solution A	102
Figure 76: Compressor power required by implementing Solution A.....	103
Figure 77: Simulation model for proposed Solution B	104
Figure 78: Revised Solution B - increased discharge pressures and pipe diameters	105
Figure 79: Compressor power required by implementing revised Solution B	106
Figure 80: Proposed power savings for the solutions measured against the baseline	106
Figure 81: Proposed infrastructure to reconfigure Mine D's compressed air network	108
Figure 82: Interconnecting pipeline installed to export compressed air from 1# to 2#.....	108
Figure 83: REMS screenshot of the compressor monitoring page.....	109
Figure 84: REMS screenshot of the valve control and network monitoring page	109
Figure 85: Bypass valve control at 2# during normal mining weekdays.....	110
Figure 86: Compressor power savings achieved during PA.....	111
Figure 87: Improved compressor power savings after fixing the air leaks at 1#	111
Figure 88: Comparison between the simulated and actual compressor power usage	112
Figure 89: Sulzer compressor performance.....	113
Figure 90: GHH compressor performance.....	113
Figure 91: Actual compressed air consumption compared to simulated flows.....	114
Figure 92: System pressures after application of the reconfiguration strategy.....	115

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Age of South African mines using the age of the mine's compressors	9
Table 2: Surface operations and compressed air requirements.....	17
Table 3: Underground operations and compressed air requirements.....	18
Table 4: Unregulated operations and compressed air requirements	19
Table 5: Implementing energy savings initiatives to improve supply-side efficiencies	22
Table 6: Properties of air at different operating temperatures	27
Table 7: Absolute roughness of general pipe materials used in the mining industry.....	32
Table 8: Compressor power wastage and cost implications of compressed air leaks	34
Table 9: Mine A compressor summary	39
Table 10: Mine A compressed air requirement- and operating schedule	39
Table 11: Mine B compressor summary.....	43
Table 12: Mine B compressed air requirement- and operating schedule	44
Table 13: Mine C compressor summary.....	69
Table 14: Mine C surface compressed air requirement schedule	70
Table 15: Mine D compressor summary	88
Table 16: Mine D surface compressed air requirement schedule.....	89
Table 17: Proposed cost savings for implementing reconfiguration strategies	119
Table 18: Actual cost savings after reconfiguring Mine D's compressed air network	120

LIST OF SYMBOLS

Symbol		Description
#	-	Denotes a mining shaft: 1# refers to number one shaft
%	-	Percentage
&	-	Denotes the word “and”
@	-	Denotes the word “at”
η	-	Efficiency
μ	-	Dynamic viscosity
ρ	-	Density of air
Δp	-	Pressure loss between two points
A	-	Area
C	-	Discharge coefficient
C_p	-	Specific heat capacity of air
D	-	Diameter
e	-	Absolute pipe roughness
f	-	Darcy-Weisbach friction coefficient
g	-	Gravitational acceleration
k	-	Specific heat ratio for air
L	-	Length
\dot{m}	-	Mass flow rate
n	-	Polytrophic constant for isentropic compression
P	-	Power
p	-	Pressure
Q	-	Volume flow rate
R	-	Gas constant for air
Re	-	Reynolds number
T	-	Temperature
v	-	Flow velocity
W	-	Mechanical energy
Z	-	Altitude

LIST OF UNITS

Unit		Description
°C	-	Degrees Celsius
CFM	-	Cubic feet per minute
GWh	-	Gigawatt hour
K	-	Kelvin
kg/m.s	-	Kilogram per meter second
kg/m ³	-	Kilogram per cubic meter
kg/s	-	Kilogram per second
kJ/kg	-	Kilojoule per kilogram
kJ/kg.K	-	Kilojoule per kilogram Kelvin
km	-	Kilometre
kPa	-	Kilopascal
kW	-	Kilowatt
kWh	-	Kilowatt hour
m	-	Meter
mm	-	Millimetre
m/s	-	Meter per second
m/s ²	-	Meters per square second
m ²	-	Square meter
m ³ /h	-	Cubic meter per hour
m ³ /s	-	Cubic meter per second
MW	-	Megawatt
MWh	-	Megawatt hour

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation		Description
CO ²	-	Carbon Dioxide
CV	-	Control Valve
DCS	-	Dynamic Compressor Selection
Dr	-	Doctor
DSM	-	Demand Side Management
EE	-	Energy Efficiency
ESCO	-	Energy Savings Company
FPP	-	Flow- and Pressure-Measuring points
GP	-	Gold Plant
IGV	-	Inlet Guide Vanes
INEP	-	Integrated National Electrification Programme
Ltd	-	Limited
M & V	-	Measurement and Verification
MV	-	Manual Valve
NP	-	No-Measuring Point
PA	-	Performance Assessment
PLC	-	Programmable Logic Controller
PP	-	Power-Measuring Point
PT	-	Pressure Transmitter
Pty	-	Proprietary
R	-	South African Rand
REMS	-	Real-Time Energy Management System
SCADA	-	Supervisory Control and Data Acquisitioning
SSM	-	Supply Side Management
VSD	-	Variable Speed Drive

LIST OF TERMS

Term	Description
Agitation	- Brisk stirring or disturbance of a liquid by using compressed air.
Blasting	- Explosion of the rock face after insertion of explosives in drilled holes.
Blow-off	- Air compressor pressure release to increase the flow through the machine, preventing it surging.
Compressor house	- Building on the mine's premises containing the air compressors used.
Compressor surge	- A sudden drop in an air compressor's delivery pressure, causing the compressor to oscillate violently.
Demand side management	- An electricity savings method financed by Eskom and usually implemented by an ESCO to positively influence the various national users' electricity consumption patterns.
Eskom	- South Africa's main electricity generator and supplier.
Hoisting	- Extraction of mined ore from underground operations to the shaft's surface.
Load shedding	- Cutting the electrical current on certain power lines off when the electrical demand tends to exceed the supply capacity.
Loading box	- Container in which mined ore is added for transportation to the extraction tipping points.

Refuge bay	-	Used by mine personnel as a place of safety during emergencies, for example fires.
Reserve margin	-	Difference between the electricity generation capacity and demand.
Shaft bottom	-	The bottom of a mining shaft.
Skip	-	Container used to carry mined ore from underground operations to the shaft's surface.
Stopes	-	An escalation in the form of steps made by the mining of ore from steeply inclined or vertical vanes (usually where the ore containing the valuable minerals is extracted).
Sweeping	-	Cleaning and evacuation of ore from the mining levels' surfaces after the blasting procedure.
Tap-off point	-	Point on a compressed air pipeline where additional equipment (compressed air users) can be added.
Tipping point	-	Location where mined ore from the loading boxes is tipped into chutes leading to the shaft's bottom.
Tramming	-	Transportation of ore to the tipping points via locomotives.
Zama zama	-	Illegal miner.