

# GEOCIVIL

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# GROWING WITH **THE COUNTRY**

*The Dominican Republic is enjoying a period of investment in infrastructure and mining activities.*

*Executive director Alejandro Gil tells Martin Ashcroft how Geocivil is growing along with it*





Geocivil office building



The Dominican Republic is attracting a great deal of attention at the moment, not least for the gold discoveries made by various mining operations, including Barrick Gold's Pueblo Viejo.

Enterprises like these need experienced, reliable contractors, and Geocivil is a local supplier that fits that mould. The company was formed in 1969, but its executives had been in business as part of a consulting firm since 1954, so the length of experience speaks for itself.

Mining is a relatively recent interest for Geocivil, however, as executive director Alejandro Gil explains. "Our main customers are large construction companies: we started working in large dam projects—we have done the geotechnical exploration for practically all the 20-plus largest dams in our country. We have also worked in most of the larger construction projects like bridges, sea ports and thermoelectric plants, among other things. In the last 20 years we started getting more involved in core drilling for mining as these projects became of greater interest for the Dominican economy."

With mining companies like Barrick Gold, Perilya Ltd, Xstrata Nickel-Falconbridge and Everton Resources among its clientele, Geocivil now has a broad range of capabilities and equipment in this area.

"We offer everything from geotechnical core drilling and in-situ testing to ground improvement, deep mine core drilling (over 1,000 meters deep) to near-shore/over-water borings for marine projects, to environmental drilling and well installation,



always focusing on quality of recovery and accuracy of sampling and reporting,” he says.

On the construction side, Geocivil has worked with major names including Constructora Norberto Odebrecht, Constructora Andrade-Gutierrez, ICA-Fluor, CBI-Chicago Bridge & Iron Works, Bouygues Offshore, CH2M Hill, Agroman and Dragados, among others.

One of the jobs he is most proud of, he says, was for an important natural gas power plant on the south coast of the Dominican Republic. “We worked on it for over two years, first in several consecutive geotechnical exploration campaigns in virgin terrain, and later performed extensive and thorough ground remediation work in a karstic coral limestone formation in a record time, involving over 11,000 meters of drilling for grouting, over 14,000 cubic meters of cement grout to fill caverns/voids, all in about six months of very intensive work with over 150 people on site.”

Another example of Geocivil’s expertise is a current mineral exploration project for an international metal mining company. “We have to core-drill down to 500 meters in an active mine with blastings nearby every day, which alter the already very broken and



Geocivil trains its own personnel

abrasive formation, and we have kept a very good record of recovery, production and minimal loss of equipment, all with a zero accident record. We have already completed about 20,000 meters of core-drilling and have a similar quantity ahead to complete in the first half of 2012.”

Another mining project, started last year, involves deep mineral exploration. “This is where we set our record depth of

1,085 meters in HQ and NQ,” says Gil. “It’s the deepest core-drilling ever done in our country, and we also drilled several other drill holes between 500 and 800 meters.” This was achieved in cooperation with Heath & Sherwood drillers, he explains, using a Maxidrill 18 rig. “By the way, the previous record was also ours, set back in 1987 at 550 meters in HQ-NQ with a Longyear 38.”

Demonstrating Geocivil’s diversity is an intensive geotechnical remediation job for the construction of a multinational telephone company’s main office building, he continues. “We had to execute over 1,200 micropiles of 200mm in diameter and 12 meters deep for the foundations, all in just a little over 10 weeks—which we did.”



Geocivil holds the Dominican record for drilling depth

**“WE HAVE WORKED IN MOST OF THE LARGER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS LIKE BRIDGES, SEA PORTS AND THERMOELECTRIC PLANTS, AMONG OTHER THINGS”**





Geocivil has 12 track mounted drills

## “WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO USE OUR EXPERIENCE TO PARTICIPATE IN LARGER PROJECTS, AND THERE HAVE BEEN MORE OF THOSE IN RECENT YEARS”

The subject of telephone companies brings us to yet another technical capability—well electrical grounding. “During the early years when work was scarce, telephone companies needed good and effective grounding systems that required only small surface areas, so drilling a well to the ground-water level and connecting that water level to the surface with a copper conductor resulted in an excellent solution for our customers. We

have been using this type of deep grounding well for over 40 years now, originally for transmission towers and lately for cellular phone system antennas.”

So, the work is varied, and depending on the size of the project, Geocivil might have six to eight small projects on the go at any time, or might alternatively be working on maybe two or three larger ones. “We have managed single projects worth over

\$5 million,” says Gil, “while many of our smaller projects are worth less than \$100,000.”

The company’s challenges include its location on a relatively small island, where drilling materials all have to be imported, which takes time and adds transportation cost. As a result, says Gil, Geocivil has to keep a large inventory of materials and spares, as well as a large metal-mechanical work shop with over 15 pieces of machinery, along with operators, for equipment rebuilding, maintenance and urgent spare parts production/repair. “Also, due to the low level of academic education in our country, and specifically due to the lack of good technical formation schools, we have been obliged to train our own personnel from the ground up.”

Geocivil’s main competitive advantage,

Gil believes, is the confidence it offers clients through its quality of service. “If we are contracted the job will be done with good quality—period. Of course this has a cost, but most customers know that you get what you pay for, and when you are doing a delicate evaluation you have to do it properly. Usually all our projects are under direct professional supervision all the time.”

Customer service improvements have been made in recent years, he adds, such as the provision of ancillary equipment and services in drilling operations, including barge/jack-up platforms, small dozers, cranes, concrete mixers and pumping units. “In this way we can provide the full service without having to engage any external contractors/subcontractors, so we give our



customers a better guarantee of execution for their projects.” There is also a subsidiary company which handles all transportation requirements, with over 35 units comprising SUVs, pickups, buses, trucks and trailers.

From a safety point of view, Geocivil has its own health, safety and environment plan but it is customary in the industry to follow the customer’s requirements for each contract. “We have a very clean HSE scorecard,” says Gil, “being usually among the best of the pack in most of the projects where we work. This includes regular training to all personnel as well as a five minute planning meeting every day to focus each team on the day’s work, risk assessment for every irregular situation, adequate equipment to contain/control any incidental situation (spills, fires, etc.) and all pertinent PPE for any given work.”

The last 10 years have seen the company’s strongest growth, in line with the development of the country’s infrastructure and increasing mining activity. “We have been able to use our experience to participate in larger projects,” says Gil, “and there have been more of those in recent years. Right now the mining industry is taking the lead, but in recent years we’ve also seen alternating opportunities in infrastructure construction and large civil works and we expect more development in the near future.” **BE**

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