

NEWS UPDATE

10 December 2008

Safety of mine and quarry workers during extreme weather events

Recently, two mine workers suffered serious injuries when the crib hut in which they had been sheltering was blown over in high winds. Investigations are still ongoing but it would appear they were struck by part of the awning attached to the hut and other loose debris. Two other mineworkers were trapped in the hut when the hut turned over and the exit door ended up face down. This warrants a timely reminder of the inherent dangers of extreme weather events, and stresses how industry must learn from previous similar incidents.

On 23 March 2007, following cyclonic weather in Western Australia and the first anniversary of cyclone Larry in North Queensland, News update 'Security of Mine and Quarry Workers During Extreme Weather Events' www.dme.qld.gov.au/zone_files/inspectorate_pdf/newsupdate_230307.pdf was released.

It warned mines and quarries located where extreme weather events may occur to ensure these are addressed in site emergency procedures. On the approach of such an event, take action, including possible evacuation from the site or retreat to safe locations such as cyclone proof buildings constructed in accordance with local government requirements or similar places of refuge.

On 10 April 2007 a Western Australian Mines Safety Bulletin No. 79, Cyclone – emergency preparation, planning and preparedness, www.docep.wa.gov.au/ResourcesSafety/PDF/Bulletins/MSH_SafBul_SB79_Emer.pdf, was forwarded through our safety alert mail-out listing. Recommendations included that every accommodation unit or donga and every transportable building on worksites and camps in cyclone sensitive regions should be adequately secured.

Shortly afterward, an accident occurred at a Queensland surface coal mine when a gust of wind hit a crib hut, causing the awning to lift up, and the hut being flipped onto its side. Three workers were injured. Safety Alert 177 Mobile Crib Hut Blown Over During Storm, was issued 7 November 2007, see www.energy.qld.gov.au/zone_files/Mines_Teri/safety_alert177.pdf.

Its recommendations were that:

- Consideration should be given for stand alone rather than attached awnings for mobile crib huts.
- A risk assessment should be conducted when choosing possible locations for mobile crib rooms.
- The risk assessment should take into account, but not be limited to, the direction of prevailing winds and possible wind tunnel effects.
- Investigate the possibility of anchoring or otherwise stabilising mobile crib huts.
- An audit should be conducted of all structures on site to ascertain their structural integrity during a storm or wind event.

Workers must be kept regularly informed of these extreme weather events and be given sufficient time to take the appropriate emergency response.

Other aspects of extreme weather, during major storms in November, included several incidents of damage and flooding from collapsed or overflowing levees and dams, including mine dams. Aside from obligations under mining legislation, under the Queensland *Water Act 2000* and common law, responsibility for the safety of a dam rests with the dam owner.

Currently, there are an estimated 300 referable dams in Queensland, (a referable dam would put population at risk if it failed) - see www.nrw.qld.gov.au/compliance/wic/referable_dams.html. The failure of these dams can cause loss of life or injury, economic loss and damage to property and the environment. Even if there is no population at risk, dams still must be designed, constructed and maintained by persons with the engineering qualification and competency to do so. Continuing incidences of dam failures highlight the need for minesite dam safety to be thoroughly addressed in the site's Safety and Health Management System.

As we are already well in to the storm season and have seen significant damage across the State, all mines and quarries that have not reviewed their procedures for adverse weather events are urgently requested to do so and to also note previous 'Safety alerts' on these matters.

Issued by:

Roger Billingham
Chief Inspector of Mines

Gavin Taylor
Chief Inspector of Coal Mines

Vision: "Our Industries Free of Safety and Health Incidents"