



# Mining Accident News No.1004

13 to 19 February 2010

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Saturday 13 February 2010

## China coal mines safer, but more changes needed

*Extract from China Daily*

BEIJING: China's coal production safety record has improved over the past 10 years, with annual fatalities at coal mines falling from a peak of 6,995 deaths in 2002 to 2,631 in 2009, according to Zhao Tiechui, head of the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety (SACMS).

Zhao said China reported over 20 major coal mine accidents (with death toll of more than 10)

in 2009, much less than the peak of 70. For each 1 million tonnes of coal produced, the mortality rate has fallen from 5.4 to less than 1 in 2009.

Zhao, however, warned that China's coal mines were still accident-prone and the world's largest coal-producing country still faced a difficult task in improving its coal mine safety.

He said China, which set up the SACMS 10 years ago to improve the safety conditions of coal mines nationwide, would still need another 10 years to "fundamentally improve" China's coal production safety record.

Zhao said China's coal-dominated energy mix would not change drastically in the next several decades and the country's coal production was expected to surpass 3.1 billion tonnes in 2010.

"Coal mine safety is still a big problem," he said. "Awareness of safety and rule of law is still low in some coal-rich areas and some coal enterprises."

China's annual coal production jumped from just over 1 billion tonnes in 2000 to almost three billion tonnes in 2009. Currently 70 percent of China's primary energy generation comes from coal.

With regards to safety, the complicating factor was that around 90 percent of more than 10,000 coal mines in China were small, and their safety record was far worse than large operations, he said.

For each 1 million tonnes of coal produced, the death toll at small mines is eight times that of large state-owned ones.

In 2009, coal produced by small mines accounted for 35 percent of national total, but the accidents and fatalities at them accounted for nearly 70 percent of the total, Zhao said.

**NOTE:** Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of Industry & Investment NSW.

He said 1,088 small coal mines were closed last year, and a total of 13,000 small coal mines had been shut down since 2005.

## **SA: Cost of Olympic Dam shaft accident tops out at \$200 million**

The hoist failure at BHP Billiton's Olympic Dam mine last October may end up costing the company as much as US\$200 million in lost revenue.

The accident, which saw a skip loaded with ore fall down the mine's primary Clark shaft, was believed to have been caused by equipment failure. The shaft has since been running at 25% capacity.

Speaking during a media teleconference this week, BHP chief executive Marius Kloppers said repairs and commissioning are likely to take several months.

"Our view is that the repairs will be completed at the end of the first quarter and that we will restart the shaft at that time with a progressive ramp up, perhaps, over the three months after that," he said.

Kloppers estimated that the accident has already cost the company around US\$115 million in "idle capacity cost".

That loss was established during the December quarter, but with the shaft expected to be operating at reduced capacity until the end of the June quarter, total costs may ultimately reach as much as US\$200 million.

According to BHP spokeswoman Kelly Quirke, investigations into the accident have been largely completed.

"Detailed investigations by the company, with a third party independent expert, have found that a fault in the logic of the braking system was the root cause of the accident," she said.

"The fault prevented the system's braking mechanism from engaging fully, which in turn

allowed the hoisting system to freefall to the bottom of the shaft."

Operator failure has been ruled out as a cause of the accident.

Monday 15 February 2010

## **Four miners rescued, two missing as Zimbabwe mine collapses**

*Extract from Zimbabwe Tribune*

Four miners rescued, two missing as Zimbabwe mine collapses.

Mines and Mining Development Minister, Obert Mpofu, told Parliament that rescue teams from his ministry were working hard to look for the two.



Obert Mpofu

The minister said this on Thursday last week while responding to a question from Insiza MP, Mr Siyabonga Ncube (MDC), who had asked what his ministry was doing to help the situation.

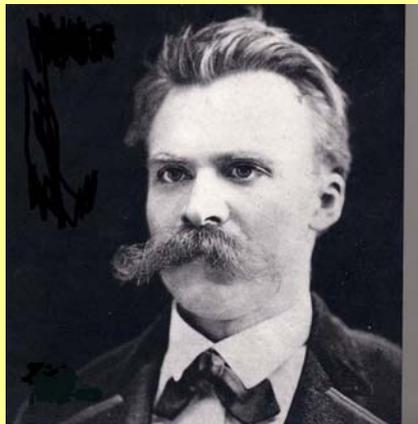
"Yes we had an accident at Antonio Mine, which saw the carving in of soil. Four people were found alive, while two have not yet been found. The two were working in a shaft and the pillar supporting the wall fell and the one holding the pillar fell with it hitting his colleague," he said. "We are still looking for the two. I want to assure the House that the police and my team are working flat out. The rescued four are recovering at Gwanda Hospital.

"Masvingo Urban Member of House of Assembly, Mr Tongai Matutu, asked the minister if he knew that workers from Shabani Mine have

been going for months without getting their salaries. He asked if that was not prudent to return the mine to its former owners, Mr Mutumwa Mawere of Africa Resources Limited.

In response, Minister Mpofu said it was important to note that SMM was being run by a Government appointed administrator. "We have no direct control as a Ministry of the administrator as he reports to a different ministry. Precisely, that is what I am saying, we have no direct saying," said Minister Mpofu.

### Quote of the week



"All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking."

Fredrich Nietzsche,  
(German philosopher, 1844-1900)

## This week in mining accident history

**19 February 2006**

**Pasta de Conchos Mine**

**Nueva Rosita, Coahuila state, Mexico**

**Underground Coal Mine**

**Methane explosion**

**65 dead**

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

The Pasta de Conchos mine disaster occurred at approximately 2:30 a.m. CST on February 19, 2006, after a methane explosion within a coal mine near Nueva Rosita, San Juan de Sabinas municipality, in the Mexican state of Coahuila. The mines were run by Grupo México, the

largest mining company in the country. It was estimated that 65 miners, who were working the 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift that morning, were trapped underground by the explosion. Only 2 of the 65 bodies have been recovered.

There have been conflicting reports regarding the depth at which the miners were trapped. The National Mining and Metal Workers Union (SNTMMSRM) stated that the trapped miners were approximately 1,600 feet below ground, via a mile-long horizontal shaft. Grupo México released a statement saying that the miners were about 500 feet below ground when the explosion occurred. Guadalupe Rosales Martínez, the sister of a worker saved from the mine opening, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the workers had previously complained about a gas leak in the mine. Norma Vitela, the wife of a mine worker trapped inside the mine, told *The Miami Herald* that her husband complained about the same leak.



The Pasta de Conchos Mine, Mexico

By February 21, 2006 Grupo México search teams and relatives of the trapped miners were beginning to lose hope. Each miner was allotted an oxygen pack, but the pack only guaranteed the miners six hours of oxygen. The Governor of Coahuila, Humberto Moreira Valdés, told the Televisa television network that the mine's ventilation service, which uses fans to import oxygen and export dangerous gases, was still in operation. However, the February 21 edition of *The Miami Herald* remarked, "Even so, they could not be certain the precious oxygen was arriving to where the miners were trapped."

On February 23, 2006 Grupo México advanced to a part of the mine shaft where they believed

two of the 65 workers were trapped. However, they found nobody, leading them to believe the force of the explosion knocked them through the mine shaft deeper than they had anticipated. The next day, Grupo México advanced approximately halfway into the 1.75-mile long mine, where an additional twenty-four miners were expected to have been found. Again, nobody was found, and Grupo México hypothesized that either the miners were buried under debris or the miners were located in a deeper part of the mine. On the evening of February 24, Grupo México announced that search efforts were to be suspended for two or three days, due to the search teams advancing to a portion of the mine which leaked out high levels of natural gas. On the afternoon of February 25 the CEO of Grupo México confirmed during a press conference that "there was no possibility of survival after the methane explosion", based on a scientific report. The following day the Secretary of Labor, Francisco Javier Salazar Sáenz, and Governor Moreira announced the mine would be closed indefinitely once all the bodies were recovered.



Relatives wait for news of loved ones

The *Diario* newspaper of Ciudad Juárez published a report from Mexican officials and the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, stating that due to the high levels of gas in the mine, it would be very rare, if not impossible, to have any survivors from the rescue efforts. *Diario* also published reports from mine workers that they had gone on strike against Grupo México at least 14 times, "not only for salary increases... but because of its constant refusal

to review security and health measures." Grupo México said that they, in conjunction with the mining union, signed a certificate on February 7, 2006 declaring the mine safe.

Tuesday 16 February 2010

### **NSW: Safety alert issued over longwall hydraulic systems**

The Mine Safety Operations Branch of Industry & Investment NSW has issued a safety alert, SA10-01, following the over pressurisation of a longwall hydraulic system, which resulted in the catastrophic failure of hydraulic isolation valves and other fittings in the pump station.

These failures released fluid under high pressure. While no person was injured, the uncontrolled release of high pressure fluid in the workplace has potential for fatal injuries.

The safety alerts can be found at:

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/safety-alerts](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/safety-alerts)

### **NSW: Safety alert issues over mine vehicle service hoists**

The Mine Safety Operations Branch of the NSW Department of Primary Industries has released a safety bulletin, SB10-04, concerning the installation of light vehicle service hoists at mine sites.

Many mines are now installing light vehicle service hoists to improve the availability of site vehicles. Typically there are two types of hoist used for this purpose: two-post and four-post.

The increased installation of two-post hoists is causing concern due to recent incidents of vehicles becoming unstable on the lifting arms and subsequently falling off the hoist.

Safety bulletins can be found at:

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/safety-bulletins](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/safety-bulletins)

## **S.Africa: Two workers killed at Rand Uranium mine**

*Extract from miningweekly.com*

JOHANNESBURG - South African junior miner Rand Uranium on Tuesday confirmed a fall-of-ground accident at its Cooke 1 underground mine, which led to the death of two miners.

The company told *Mining Weekly Online* that the cause of the accident had not yet been determined, and that investigations had been taking place during the course of the day.

Following a joint inspection by the Inspector of Mines and mine management, all development on Cooke 1 and 2 had been stopped pending further interaction with the Department of Mineral Resources on the results of the investigation.

Rand Uranium CEO John Munro said that the company was working with the authorities to identify the cause of the accident.

Thursday 18 February 2010

## **South Australian mine safety regulation needs overhaul, report**

A public consultation process has begun on how best to improve safety regulations in South Australia's mining industry and align them with other jurisdictions.

SafeWork SA says it has released a discussion paper and will be seeking the views of all interested parties in the mining sector.

SafeWork SA executive director Michele Patterson claims current regulation of mine safety in the state needs modernisation to better serve the growing industry.

"This program of work is part of a wider effort to achieve nationally consistent legislation in line with similar reforms in general occupational health and safety," Patterson said.

"This consultation is designed to build upon efforts already underway through the National

mine safety Framework, which seeks to achieve nationally consistent workplace safety legislation for the Australian mining industry."

The discussion paper contains a number of proposals resulting from discussions with technical advisers and other industry experts.

Patterson does emphasise however, the paper is not a final position but rather a starting point.

There will be an eight-week consultation period, with submissions due by the close of business on 6 April 2010.

A copy of the discussion paper and details on where to lodge submissions can be found on the SafeWork SA website <http://www.safework.sa.gov.au>.

## **Uralkali Will Pay Compensation To Deceased Worker's Family**

*Extract from Rus Business News, Russia*

THE PERM KRAI.

In the morning 18 February 2010 as a result of an accident at the mine of the Second Mining Authority (BKPRU-2) of JSC Uralkali a tunnelling combine machinist has died. The company's management has expressed deep condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. A compensation will be paid to the victim's family.

The JSC Uralkali informed RusBusinessNews that there has been a gas and ore blow out in the mineshaft. The tunnel back has partially collapsed as a result the combine and its machinist got stuck under the collapsed material.

Providing safe working environment for the employees is the top priority for JSC Uralkali. An official investigation of causes of the accident will be conducted in the nearest future; the results of the investigation will help preventing similar occurrences in the future. This event will not reflect on the company's production plans.

Friday 19 February 2010

## **USA: Mine safety advocates 'disappointed' with MSHA's fatality prevention program**

*Opinion from West Virginia Public Broadcasting*

State officials stand by the approach while advocates say it's more of the same.

Mine safety officials and advocates are speaking up about the latest initiative from the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Earlier this month, the nation's new mine safety chief, Joe Main, unveiled a fatality prevention program. Now, inspectors are to look for the most common citations that lead to fatalities.

As part of the initiative, MSHA compiled data about mine fatalities from 2000 to 2008. West Virginia had the most deaths with 94 followed by Kentucky.

West Virginia's chief mine safety officer, Ron Wooten, commends the federal agency for recognizing specific standards that are not met that lead to fatalities.

"Any time any agency, federal or state, raises the specter of increased initiatives towards prevention of fatalities that's a positive," Wooten said. "Even if it's not followed up that's a positive."

"With identification of these standards, everyone needs to be on notice that the federal and state government will be looking to enforce those standards."

Last year, West Virginia suffered three mine deaths, down from nine the previous year. Two out of the three were contract workers -- not hired by the mine, but by an outside hiring firm. Sometimes those workers have certification, and sometimes they don't.

In 2008, 4 of the 9 people killed in West Virginia mines were contract workers.

Wooten says there's still work to do, in preventing contract mine worker fatalities.

"We're addressing these on a case by case basis but we're being consistent across the board, we intend to stop contractor fatalities period," he said.

"We believe once we know where these contractors are and who they are working for and get the operators to understand that they too have a responsibility for these contractors who are working for them then we'll get to where we need to be" Wooten, is promising to redouble the state's efforts, too.

"We have committed to MSHA that we will do a similar review of our standards to see which of those standards may impact on fatalities in the state," he said.

Meanwhile, Kentucky lawyer and longtime mine safety advocate Tony Oppegard says the new MSHA program is a disappointment.

"There is a need for fundamental change in MSHA," Oppegard said. "We don't need more slogans and compliance assistance. I understand that education is always a part of mine safety and that's ok but to launch this major campaign, it's really nothing different than anything we saw in the last 25 or 30 years."

"We could have had two guys sit down in a room for 15 minutes and come up with the types of issues that are raised in this campaign."

Oppegard says MSHA should look at how Kentucky revamped its mine safety regulations, after disasters at the Sago mine in West Virginia and at Darby in Kentucky.

"Quite frankly MSHA could take a page from what we've done in Kentucky," he said. "In 2007 we passed a mine safety law that had a dozen provisions in it that exceed the federal law, and there's no reasons why those can't be made in the federal law they're all common sense."

Oppegard wants a revamped special investigation program, more subpoena power in fatality cases, and 48-hour notification before starting the most dangerous type of mining:

retreat or pillar mining. He says the most effective step would be increased inspections.

"We in Kentucky now require six annual inspections of every underground coal mines," he said. "Four complete inspections the same as MSHA and two mandated electrical inspections. There are no electrical inspections in federal law."

Oppegard also says Kentucky investigates every serious non-fatal accident.

"MSHA does not do reports on serious non fatal accidents because of that they are missing out on a great opportunity on what caused these accident," he said. "You break your back in a roof fall and you're a parapalegic you can't work for the rest of your life well that's almost as devastating as being killed."

In 2006, Kentucky lost 12 miners. Since then, the number of deaths has fluctuated between two and eight, and Oppegard says MSHA could reduce mine deaths nationwide by a similar amount.

"Someone just needs to grab the bull by the horns and say we're going to make these fundamental changes that should have been made a long time ago and not fall back into these old patterns of the same old same old that's been going on the last 30 to 40 years at MSHA."

So far this year, Kentucky has suffered one mine death, while West Virginia has none.

## **USA: For injured mine inspector, tragedy led to misery**

*Extract from Salt Lake Tribune*

Price -- Federal mine inspector Frank Markosek risked his life in the summer of 2007 trying to rescue six trapped miners in the Crandall Canyon coal mine.

For his efforts, he has endured 2½ years of physical and mental anguish from injuries suffered when a mine wall blew in on the

rescuers -- killing three, wounding six -- and from the bureaucratic nightmare that followed.

The experience has left the third-generation miner asking, "Why am I being punished because I didn't die?"

As a federal employee, Markosek's months of medical treatment and rehabilitation for numerous broken bones and a traumatic brain injury were covered by the federal workers' compensation program. But after a time, the U.S. Labor Department agency that administers the program urged him to join other disaster victims in a wrongful death and injury lawsuit against the mine's owners, primarily Murray Energy Corp., and their insurance carriers.

When the case was settled out of court last year, the Labor Department required him to repay the workers' comp program for what it had laid out for his medical care and lost wages, minus "reasonable attorneys' fees and court costs." The reason? The Federal Employees' Compensation Act, supported by long-established case law, mandates that beneficiaries of litigation against a third party must reimburse the federal government before getting their share of the lawsuit's proceeds.

Markosek, 59, cannot disclose how much money that is, citing a confidentiality clause in the settlement agreement (whose value also has not been revealed). But the reimbursement easily exceeded six figures -- a sizable portion of his share of the settlement.

"Congressmen probably go to dinner on that much [money]," he said sarcastically. "But to me, that's a bunch of living."

Markosek was not entirely alone in his financial exposure. Lola Jensen had to repay medical expenses incurred by her late husband, Gary, also a Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) inspector, in the few hours he lived after being injured in the blast. Because he died that night, her debt was much smaller.

All of the others who died or were injured were employees of Murray Energy's subsidiaries. But

in consultation with its insurance carriers, the company was able to cover the workers' comp repayments they owed to the state.

That flexibility was not available in dealing with the federal employees.

### **No separate deals**

Markosek could have recouped some of his workers' comp obligation by claiming a larger share of the settlement offer made by the mine owners. But the way the agreement worked, the companies made an all-encompassing offer that the victims as a group had to accept or reject. Once accepted, they had to figure out among themselves how to divide the lump sum.

"For Frank to try and negotiate a separate deal, or a deal that got him more money to cover the repayment could have scuttled the whole deal," said Spencer Siebers, one of Markosek's attorneys.

"Frank was not willing to do that. There were folks in the case who needed that case to settle, and Frank was certainly not willing to hold them up or try to better his circumstances at their expense," Siebers added. "He went into that mine to fight for those guys at great personal expense, and he kept fighting for them at real cost to himself throughout the negotiations."

Instead, Markosek and his attorneys tried to get the federal compensation program to waive the repayment. But as Markosek's lead attorney, Fred Silvester, noted in a letter seeking assistance from U.S. Sen. Bob Bennett's staff, the Labor Department agency responded that it could not compromise or forgive the bill "irrespective of the circumstances of the accident or the strength or weakness of the case."

A department spokesman later told The Salt Lake Tribune that the workers' comp program "obtains millions of dollars in reimbursements ... every year, and the repayment has never been waived."

The only solution was to turn to Bennett and Sen. Orrin Hatch for help. Markosek did that through his sharp-tongued wife, Trudy. But to the couple's disgust, Utah's senators have provided little more than "lip service," Markosek said. "They say, 'Oh, that ain't right. We'll look into it.' But that's as far as it goes."

Bennett spokeswoman Tara DiJulio said her boss appreciates the "heroic and selfless" actions of Markosek and the other rescuers. Although Bennett continues to seek a solution, she said, "it would take an act of Congress and the president to overturn this law, which would dramatically alter workers' compensation requirements for all federal employees and could result in some unintended circumstances."

For privacy reasons, Hatch does not discuss cases brought to him by constituents, said spokesman Mark Eddington. But "if a Utahn approached him with a case similar to this one, he would do all he can ... to help. Unfortunately, sometimes cases such as these come down to what the law says, and if the law specifically prescribes the repayment of the money, then there is little that can be done.

"The MSHA employees who risked everything in the 2007 Crandall Canyon mine disaster are true heroes, and they deserve the respect and the thanks of a grateful nation," Eddington added. "Senator Hatch truly hopes something can be worked out to help them."

Poppycock, fired back Trudy Markosek. "They don't give a s--- about it."

### **Reliving the tragedy**

The Markoseks' nightmare began Aug. 16, 2007, at 6:38 p.m.

The laborious effort to rescue six miners missing deep underground after a massive collapse of the mine's walls was in its 10th day. Markosek had been assigned to Crandall Canyon for the first time the afternoon before, teaming with fellow MSHA inspectors Jensen and Scott Johnson to monitor Murray Energy crews

clawing through debris-filled tunnels toward the last known working area of the missing six.

He felt the operation was under control, largely by the noises the Emery County mountain was making as crews tunneled through it, setting up steel reinforced chain-link fence structures to keep the walls in place.

"We were hearing bumps and bounces, some pretty decent bangs," Markosek said. "It felt to me like the mountain was relieving and not building up [pressure]. You get nervous when it's quiet."

So he was caught off guard when the tunnel's right wall exploded without warning, pummeling rescuers with chunks of coal and steel beams. Markosek recalls only that he was talking to Jensen, and that the doomed crew's shift would have ended as soon as it finished setting up support materials along the left wall. A replacement crew already was in the mine, driving to the working face.

"Five more minutes, and everybody would've been back out of the way," he lamented recently in his Price home. "Five or 10 more minutes and nobody would have been hurt."

Markosek does not remember being pulled from debris that piled up 4 feet deep in the tunnel, riding out of the mine in the back of a pickup or taking an ambulance ride from Huntington Canyon to Castleview Hospital in Price. "Somebody upstairs was watching out for me because I missed all the gory stuff," he said. "I guess he decided I didn't need to know that."

He came to briefly at the hospital, where Trudy and daughter Tammy were waiting after news spread of the accident. Trudy was not prepared for what she saw. "His eye was popped out [of its socket] and all his face below it was crushed in," she said. "I was in shock. I never felt that Frank would get hurt in a mine, ever, because he was so good at his job."

But he was, badly enough that he was airlifted to Utah Valley Regional Medical Center in Provo,

where he spent almost two weeks receiving intensive treatment.

"My ankle was broke, my leg was broke, my knee was tore up, my tailbone was broke, I think three bones in my back, two bones in my neck, my elbow, three ribs. I think there was some pelvic injuries, too, and lots of cuts and bruises," Markosek recounted. "And my head injury. I have a plate in my head now. And I had some brain damage."

### **A chapter that needs closing**

After his release from the hospital, he endured months of physical rehabilitation, "basically I about had to learn how to walk all over again." For four months, Trudy drove him to and from Murray, where he spent weekdays in a motel so therapists from Rehab Without Walls could help him learn how to deal with his traumatic brain injury.

The injury "changed my attitude," he said. "Before, I was a mellow person. Nothing upset me. But after that, I went just the opposite. Things would really set me off quick."

Over time, Markosek made progress. He learned to control his temper. He slept more. He could take walks. Eventually, he could play the piano and drive short distances. But he couldn't continue restoring vintage automobiles because of dizzy spells brought on by the brain injury. And the sight of little pieces of coal embedded in his cheek, creating a Zorro-like scar, bothered him so badly every time he looked in the mirror that he had to have surgery to remove it.

Along the way, he and Trudy missed the note from the federal Office of Workers' Compensation Program, informing them of the need to repay the federal government if a third-party settlement were reached.

Lola Jensen didn't. She got her letter in the mail within days of her husband's death.

"It was very disturbing. It said that with our workers' compensation policy, if a third party was to be found liable, then we had to sue or we

would risk losing our workers' comp funds. And it laid out a formula for what they would expect back."

By the time the Markoseks learned from their attorneys about the reimbursement requirement, most medical expenses had been incurred.

"I would have probably done some things differently, on some of the doctors they made me go see," he said. "It doesn't bother me so much that I have to pay the medical [expenses] back, but it bothers me I have to pay back the wages that I would have been earning."

Would have. Markosek is retired, on long-term disability. His retirement party was held last September at the Carbon Country Club. MSHA's top coal official, Kevin Stricklin, attended. For his service to the agency, Markosek received a safety lamp.

That's a meaningful but small reward for putting your life on the line, said Price Mayor Joe Piccolo, a fervent supporter of Markosek's cause.

"We've made some progress to help all of those most affected in the Crandall Canyon accident. This is the final chapter that needs to be closed," Piccolo said. "It needs to be done fairly and equitably."



**Management of Human Error workshop**

Industry & Investment NSW will be holding free a half-day Management of Human Error workshop at the Lower Hunter BEC building, Kurri Kurri on Thursday, 25 February 2010.

For further information download the flyer below:

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/304773/Management-of-human-error-workshop-flyer---Feb-2010.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0006/304773/Management-of-human-error-workshop-flyer---Feb-2010.pdf)

## Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

### S

#### stulls

A set of wooden props placed across a stope to stabilise the sides or roof, and to provide a working platform and ore holding area.



Stulls supporting a stope in a lead mine

#### surfacing

The removal of surface soil for treatment to extract gold.



Topsoil removal for treatment

-Ed



Strip mining

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