

INVESTIGATION INFORMATION RELEASE

DATE: JUNE 2021

Worker seriously injured by recoiling pipe

Incident date: 23 April 2021

Event: Worker injured by recoiling pipe

Location: Tahmoor Colliery, Tahmoor NSW

Overview

A mine worker, underground at the Tahmoor Colliery, was struck by a recoiling six metre polyethylene pipe. The pipe, which was protruding from a flatbed trailer, became stuck on the gas range when workers were attempting to shunt the trailer to a new location. The worker, who was spotting for the driver of the mine vehicle shunting the trailer, sustained serious injuries requiring hospital treatment. The worker is expected to make a full recovery.

The mine

Tahmoor Coking Coal is an underground coal mine that began operations in 1979. The mine has approval to produce up to three million tonnes of run of mine (ROM) coal per annum. Coal is mined from within the Bulli seam, producing hard coking coal for steel production and minor thermal coal. Product coal is transported via rail to Port Kembla for both Australian customers and export customers. The mining operations, in the Tahmoor North lease area, are forecasted almost complete. Subsequently, the mining operation is expected to move to a new mining Domain (Tahmoor South) at Bargo.

The incident

On 23 April 2021 at about 10:40pm, three underground workers, known as the Tahmoor South Ventilation Crew (the vent crew), were undertaking a task that required the use of a man basket attachment for a Load Haul Dump machine (LHD). The workers located the man basket attachment behind a stowed flatbed trailer that contained six metre polyethylene pipes. The vent crew were required to shunt the trailer to a new location so that they could access the man basket. Two workers from the vent crew worked as spotters and directed the driver of the LHD while he shunted the pipe trailer out of the way. Spotters were used due to poor visibility, because of a low roof and gas drainage range in the roadway. As the LHD shunted the pipe trailer out of the cut through, one of the polyethylene pipes in the trailer contacted the gas range and was bent back before recoiling and hitting one of the vent crew who was spotting for the LHD driver. The worker collapsed from the impact. The other worker who was also spotting for the LHD driver signalled the LHD driver to stop. The mine called NSW Ambulance whilst the workers transported the injured worker a short distance out of the mine, where he was transported by ambulance to hospital for treatment. The worker suffered a fractured sternum and a collapsed lung. The worker is expected to make a full recovery.

The investigation

The incident occurred at about 10:40pm on 23 April 2021. The incident was notified to the Regulator at about 7:30am on 24 April 2021. The scene was not preserved. The Mine Operator justified this on the basis that it was required to transport the injured worker to the surface. Upon receiving the incident notification, the Regulator commenced a preliminary investigation that involved a scene assessment and speaking with statutory officials. A S195 prohibition notice was issued under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* to prevent the transportation or use without an appropriate risk assessment. On 10 May 2021, a decision was made by the Regulator to commence an investigation into the cause and circumstances of the incident.

Recommendations

The investigation is ongoing to determine the causal factors involved in this incident. Following preliminary enquiries, it is recommended that mine operators:

- Assess the risks associated with pedestrians and spotters near loads being moved in confined areas and develop controls to eliminate or minimise the risk.
- Ensure that a risk assessment for the principal hazard of roads and other vehicle operating areas includes risks and controls relating to large loads, obstacles in roadways, shunting and storage of mine equipment.

- Train their workforce to ensure all loads are managed, and minimum clearances between mobile and fixed plant are maintained

Further information

Please refer to the following guidance materials:

- *Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum sites) Regulations 2014 Cl14(f) and Cl22*

About this information release

The Regulator has issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a serious incident in the mining industry. Further information may be published as it becomes available.

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