

SAFETY BULLETIN

DATE: MARCH 2022

Hand injuries (including fingers and thumbs)

This safety bulletin provides safety advice for the NSW mining industry.

Issue

The NSW Resources Regulator has noted an increase in the number of reported injuries involving hands within the mining sector. One hundred and forty-one hand injuries were reported to Regulator during 2021. Hands, fingers and thumbs being caught, crushed, jammed and/or pinched was the most common cause of injury. While some injuries such as minor lacerations were treated with sutures or glue, some more serious hand injuries resulted in fractures, tendon or nerve damage. Some workers suffered injuries requiring surgery and ongoing specialist care. Nine workers had one or more fingers amputated over the past 12 months.

Mining and hand injuries

Operational and maintenance tasks can be highly complex and intricate tasks that require workers to place their hands within or near equipment that has sharp edges, pinch points or can move. In addition, mine workers undertaking these tasks also needs to manage:

- working near moving and rotating equipment
- load shifting during parts removal and change out
- underground environments with limited light
- undertaking tasks in tight awkward positions with restricted visual capacity.

Workers were wearing gloves in most incidents, and on some occasions workers were not aware they had suffered an injury until they had removed their gloves.

Recommendations

Finding solutions to eliminate hand injuries should focus on the hierarchy of controls.

It is recommended mine operators:

- consider the hierarchy of controls when completing risk assessments
- eliminate the opportunity for workers to enter crush areas, pinch points and entanglement hazards by using guarding or isolation.
- If fixed guarding is not appropriate, consider interlocked guarding so that a machine cannot be started until the guarding is closed.
- When components and parts are being removed, loads must be secured and supported and potential load movement is considered when identifying hazards.
- Workers need to consider where they place their hands to avoid the potential for falling objects such as drill steels and material such as rocks and strata
- Ensure work area lighting is suitable for the task being carried out
- Consider the use of visual aids such as fluoro or bright coloured gloves that can be more easily seen in dark environments
- Involve workers to identify pinch/crush points and identify solutions to control the hazard. For example, in man baskets place handrails inside the baskets to eliminate the need to grab the top of the basket.
- Provide workers with information, training, instruction and supervision on working with equipment that has moving parts, sharp equipment, tools and pinch points. Workers new to the mining industry will need additional training and supervision.
- Ensure workers are provided with and are using the correct tools and equipment to undertake the task.
- Additional controls developed from previous injuries must be implemented and communicated to workers to avoid reoccurrence.

NOTE: Please ensure all relevant people in your organisation receive a copy of this safety bulletin and are informed of its content and recommendations. This safety bulletin should be processed in a systematic manner through the mine's information and communication process. It should also be placed on the mine's common area, such as your notice board where appropriate.

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

CM9 reference	RDOC22/18649
Mine safety reference	SB22-04
Date published	15 March 2022

Office of the Chief Inspector