

COMPLIANCE PRIORITIES OUTCOMES

Contractor management in coal mines

January 2022

Contractor management

In mining workplaces there will be multiple duty holders influencing how work is carried out. This will typically include the mine operator, single or multiple contractors supplying equipment, carrying out production work, repairing equipment and undertaking other activities. Additionally, there are some suppliers and contractors who are infrequently on site.

The work, health and safety (WHS) laws require duty holders, with shared responsibilities, to work together to make sure workers do what is required to maintain a safe workplace. This requires consultation, cooperation, and coordination between all duty holders.

The Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014 builds on this requirement and makes specific provision for the arrangements between an operator of a mine and other persons conducting businesses or undertakings, including contractors.

Through this priority project, data was gathered to determine the industry's understanding of working with contract partners and their legal responsibilities to maintain a safe workplace. This included a particular focus on how the mine and its contractors managed safety. This focused on the requirements of clause 22 of the Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014, where the mine and the contractor determine which safety management plan the work is conducted under.

The project also examined how safety critical information was communicated and disseminated to contractors, including labour hire contractors, project contractors and maintenance contractors. Furthermore, inspections were undertaken to confirm how the mine operator ensured plant, equipment and substances were safe for use, how competencies were checked and how supervision was carried out.

What we did

Forty-nine mines were assessed between June 2021 and October 2021. There were 30 surface mines and 19 underground mines.

Areas assessed at each mine were:

- Safe systems of work
- Competency
- Plant, equipment, materials, and substances
- Consultation, information, training, and instruction
- Risk management
- Supervision and monitoring

What we found

Some of the key findings that resulted from the program plan included:

- Forty-seven of the 49 mines assessed had safe systems of work documented and implemented.
- Some mines included contractors in the overall training analysis for the mine.
- Contract supervisors were trained to the standard set out in the training and competency scheme for the site.
- Contractor representatives were frequently part of the sites Health, Safety, Environment and Community committee (HSEC committee).
- Contractor representatives were involved in risk assessment teams, and in the development of safe systems of work (relevant to the work being undertaken by the contract workgroup).
- Sites that implemented a permit to work system for contractor workgroups could readily provide evidence of this system being implemented, with site co-ordinator intervention as necessary. This included authorising the work, inspections throughout the project and sign-off for final review.
- Contract work groups were well informed about activities occurring at the mine that were of relevance to their work tasks, such as altered travel routes and changes to emergency equipment.
- There was effective stakeholder engagement about introduction to site processes for contract specific plant brought to site.
- Mock emergency scenarios on-site included contract work groups.
- A low number of sites had systems of work specific to contractor management more than a three-yearly review.
- The majority of mines had an electronic log -in system that indicated if critical training was due for renewal or was outside the acceptable date range.

Outcomes

The assessments resulted in the following notices being issued:

- One Section 191 Improvement notice.
- Two Section 23 Notices of concern.

Next steps

The Resources Regulator will continue to assess contractor management in coal mines through planned inspections and targeted interventions. Results of these inspections will be monitored to determine whether a more detailed assessment of industry practice is required, and whether industry assistance through some form of education is needed.

Mine operators are also encouraged to review the outcomes of this report and determine potential areas of improvement that may be applicable to their own operations.

Recommendations

To address the continued compliance of contractor management, industry should:

- maintain the levels of stakeholder engagement with contract workgroups as necessary
- conduct regular audits of safe systems of work relevant to contract workgroups
- limit, where practicable the duplication of work records
- ensure an appropriate representation of contractors are involved in risk assessments and the development of systems of work relevant to the contract work being undertaken
- understand the limitations of newly appointed contract supervisors who may not have worked in a supervisory capacity before. Inquire what training has been completed and what ongoing support is to be provided.

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