



MINE SAFETY INVESTIGATION UNIT

INFORMATION RELEASE

Fatality

Date	7 March 2013
Event	Body found at bottom of a blind shaft
Location	Lightning Ridge, NSW

The Location

Lightning Ridge is a well-known opal mining and fossicking area with a large number of mineral claims in and about the town. The most common method of mining is underground mining, accessed via a one metre diameter shaft drilled through sandstone and conglomerate beds. There are a large number of shafts throughout the opal fields, and all are required to be backfilled, covered and/or fenced.

The Incident

The incident occurred on current Mineral Claim 32904 in the Canfells Opal Field Map 19-13 Lightning Ridge.

A deceased person was found in a mineral claim shaft at Lightning Ridge, NSW at about 9.30am Thursday 7 March 2013.

The deceased was last seen leaving a group of companions to walk home on the previous evening. The shaft in which he was found was adjacent to the path he had taken, a path he had taken on previous occasions.

The following morning a person living on the mineral claim noticed that the shaft cover was off the shaft, and replaced it. After doing so he saw the deceased at the bottom of the shaft.

The shaft

The shaft was 13.6 metres deep and was a blind shaft, i.e. no workings had been developed from it. It had been drilled about six months prior to the incident. The collar of the shaft was raised approximately 0.1m above the ground and lined the top of the hole. It was 1.05m in diameter at the top.

The shaft had a cover constructed of a piece of steel reinforcing mesh and steel pipe.

The shaft was located on the claim boundary about 50 metres from the witness's residence. There were other shafts on the claim and a number of vehicles related to earthmoving activities located nearby.



The shaft and cover as described by a witness

Controls

The department currently provides guidance material to claim holders detailing that all opal mine shafts be either fenced or covered, with the cover being secured to the ground by at least two pegs on one side. A copy of the guidance material can be obtained from the department's office at Lightning Ridge.

Investigation

The Mine Safety Investigation Unit has begun a formal investigation into the incident. Investigators will examine, among other things, the adequacy of the design of the installation and the suitability of the cover for ensuring that people do not fall down the shaft or sustain other injuries from contacting or walking on the cover.

About this information release

The Mine Safety Investigation Unit has issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a serious incident in the mining industry. The investigation is in the initial stages. Further information may be published as it becomes available.

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services or the user's independent adviser.

Information about the Investigation Unit and its publications can be found at:

www.resources.nsw.gov.au/safety/major-investigations

For information about health and safety regulation on mine sites contact a mines inspector at one of our local offices www.resources.nsw.gov.au/safety/mine-safety-offices.

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