Safety Alert

NSW RESOURCES REGULATOR

DATE: DECEMBER 2018

Opal miner injured in shaft fall

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

Issue

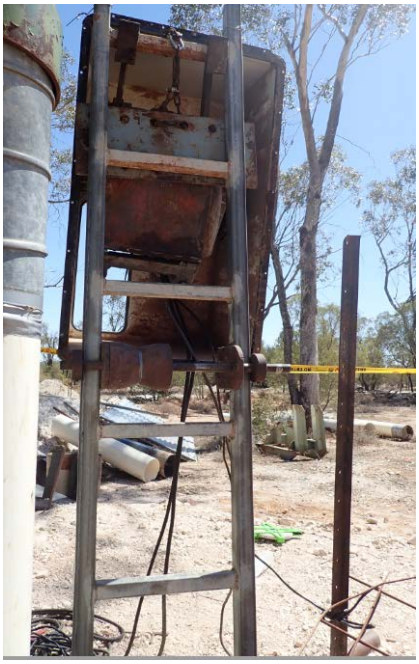
An opal miner fell down a mine shaft and an emergency rescue was activated near Lightning Ridge, NSW. The incident occurred in the morning of 13 September 2018.

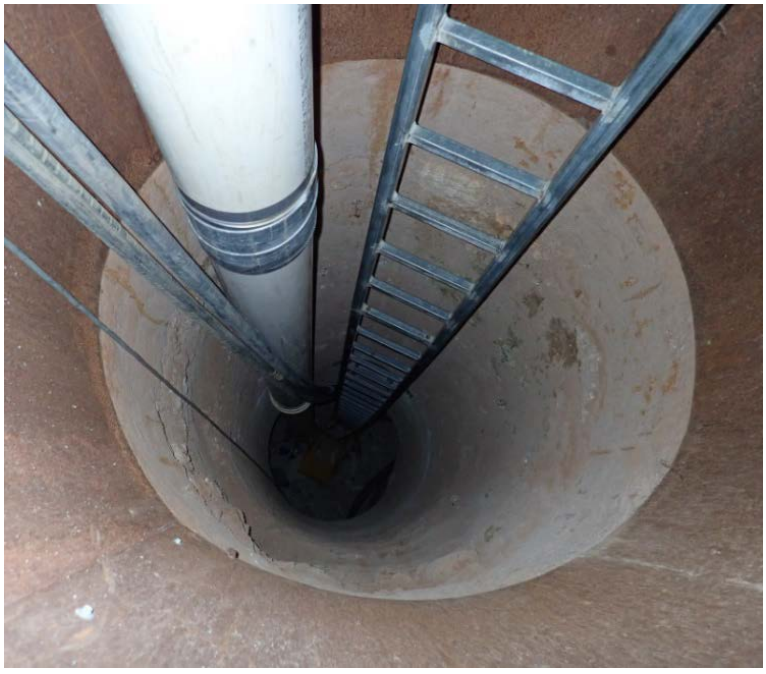
Circumstances

After completing maintenance work at the surface, an opal miner climbed down a nine-metre shaft using a vertical access ladder. During the descent, the miner stopped about two metres from the bottom of the shaft to look downwards. The miner lost balance and slipped from the ladder to the shaft bottom. The miner suffered a compound fracture of his lower right leg and a broken lower left leg. The miner was not using fall prevention equipment.

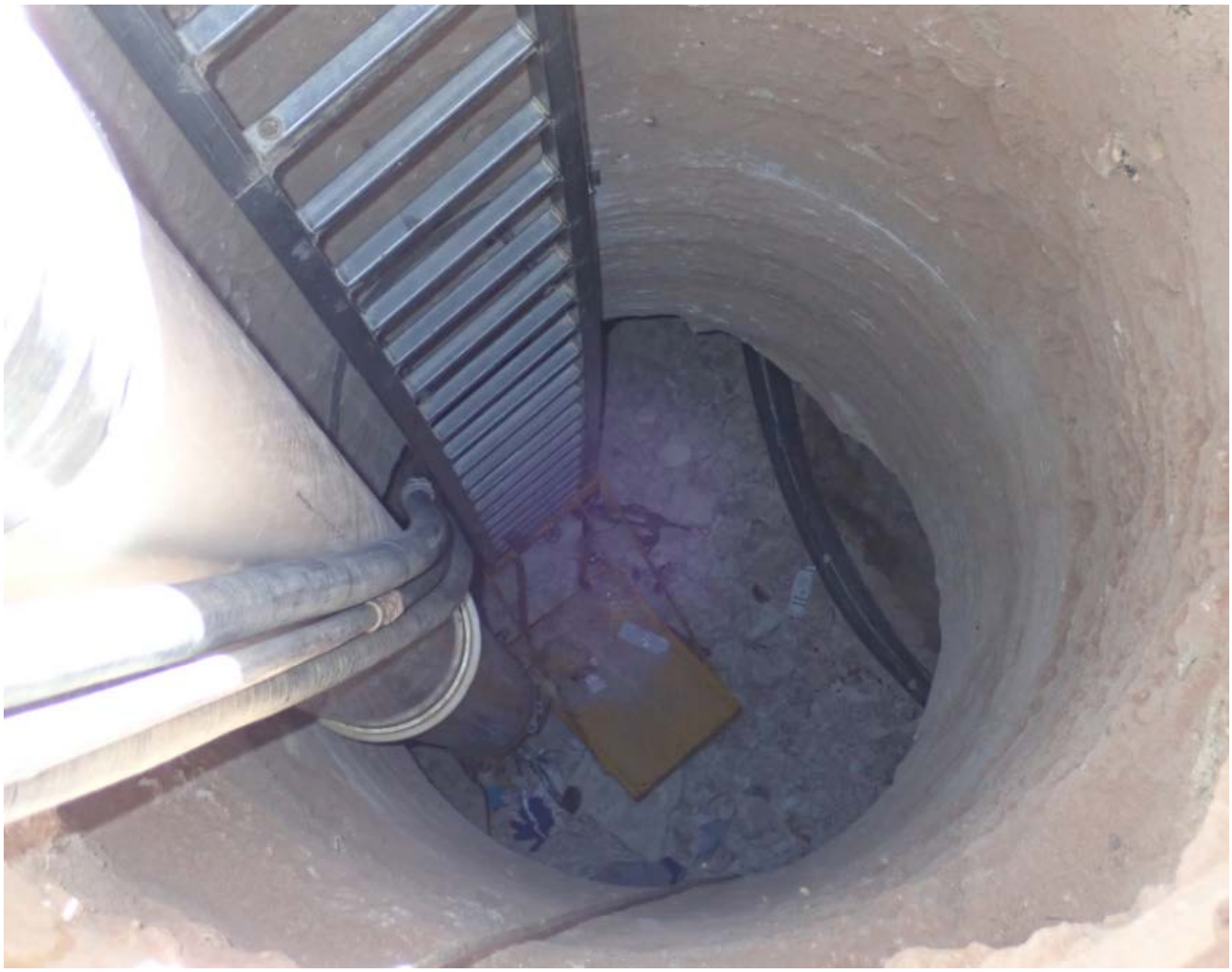
The opal miner was working alone and was unable to call for assistance. The miner was not found for more than 10 hours. A family member became concerned that the miner had not returned home and a search took place. The miner was discovered about 7pm and rescued about 10pm by a rope rescue from the shaft conducted by emergency services.

Photographs 1 and 2: View from the top of the shaft showing the access ladder arrangement. (Photographs by Resources Regulator)





Photograph 3: View of the base of the shaft showing the access ladder and where the opal miner fell. (Photograph by Resources Regulator)

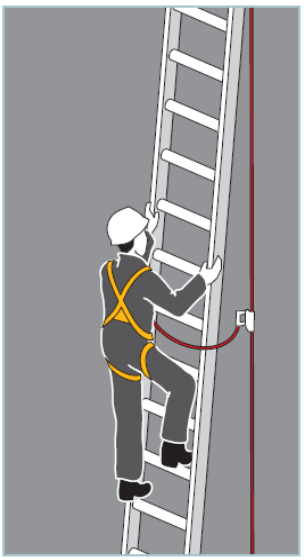


Investigation

NSW Resources Regulator inspectors attended the scene to assess the incident and identified the following factors:

- **There were no fall from height controls while using the access ladder.** The access ladder was also used to support a winch for a platform that the miner lowered to the shaft base. The winch rope had been raised back to the surface before the incident.
- **There were no means to raise an emergency response from the shaft.** The opal miner was working alone at a remote mine site. There were no means of communicating to the surface from the shaft.

Recommendations



Mine operators should consider:

1. The Model code of practice - *Managing the risk of falls at workplaces. (see figure 25 at right)*
2. Include the provision for training and instruction in fit-for-purpose equipment in falling from height protocols to ensure it is properly used, stored, tested, maintained and discarded where appropriate.
3. If a ladder is used for access, it must be fit-for-purpose and regularly inspected.
4. Developing a working-at-heights plan that considers self rescue and emergency management.
5. Reviewing the effectiveness of emergency communication systems.

Relevant publications

→ SA18-12 date 12 November 2018 Worker falls from conveyor gantry

→ SB18-10 date 29 May 2018 People warned of fall risk in opal mine fields

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

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