

Fact sheet

Notifying emergency services

January 2023

Emergency planning

This fact sheet provides information about notifying emergency services resulting from an incident at a mine or petroleum site in NSW. This fact sheet should be read in conjunction with the [Consultation with emergency services fact sheet](#). Notification to emergency services is in addition to any incident notifications required under the work health and safety laws.

Early notification can be critical

In a site-based emergency, early notification can be critical to ensure a timely, effective response. This includes both site-based emergency responders and external resources.

To be effective, mine emergency plans must be consistent with the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*, and its associated plans. Investigations into mine disasters have highlighted the detrimental results that can occur when a site's emergency plans are not complementary to emergency services' plans.

Even though an immediate response may not be required from the emergency services, awareness of a potentially evolving incident may provide an opportunity to ensure resources are available if needed.

Obligations for mines

The work health and safety laws require mine and petroleum site operators to prepare, maintain and implement an emergency plan. This includes a requirement to notify emergency services at the earliest opportunity (Clause 43 Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017). In certain circumstances, some mine operators are required to consult directly with emergency services (Section 92 Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2022), that includes addressing which incidents or events should be notified to the emergency service organisations.

In addition to the work health and safety laws, there are many other Acts, plans and policies that should be considered and adopted into the mine's emergency plan, particularly those with notification requirements. The code of practice for emergency planning at mines contains more information on this. Examples include:

- *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*
- *Coroners Act 2009*
- *Rural Fires Act 1997*
- *Fire and Rescue NSW Act 1989*
- *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*
- NSW State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) 2018

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- NSW Mine Sub Plan
- NSW State Rescue Policy

Terminology used

Effective communication during emergencies is critical. This goes beyond communication between mine staff and includes communication between the mine and emergency services. Consistency in terminology and defined terms is essential to reducing confusion and potentially wasting time during emergencies.



Many defined terms can be found in the NSW EMPLAN, the Mine Sub Plan and the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*. An important definition for mine operators to recognise is the term 'rescue' and how this is intended to be applied for the purposes of the Mine Sub Plan and obligations to notify emergency services at the earliest opportunity.

Rescue coordination

Rescue management in NSW comes under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*, and its associated State Rescue Policy.

This does not prevent a mine from activating its own site-based response to an incident, but it is important to understand that the above arrangements also apply to mining operations.

Of importance is the role the NSW Police have in co-ordinating rescue operations and determining the priorities of action at rescues includes those at mine sites (Section 50 *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*). The Mine Sub Plan requires mine operators to ensure that NSW Police are immediately notified of any event where a rescue is required. But what constitutes a 'rescue'?

Definition of a rescue

The *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* defines rescue as: 'the safe removal of persons or domestic animals from actual or threatened danger of physical harm'.

Mine emergency plans and associated notification processes should reflect this definition of 'rescue'. While some cases will be obvious, such as where rescue teams are required to release someone physically trapped by a collapse for instance, other circumstances may not be so. Here are some case studies to explain how this is applied:

Scenario 1:

A lift in a three-story building becomes stuck between floors and the people inside are not able to get out of the lift. The building owner has notified the lift company technician and another person in

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the lift calls '000'. This incident is deemed to be a rescue as the people are not able to get out of the lift unassisted.

People stuck in a shaft winder or other similar transport that fails should be treated as an active rescue incident until it is resolved unless it can be immediately rectified.

Scenario 2:

Two vehicles are involved in an accident. Although relatively minor, one of the passengers has aggravated an old back injury. While the doors of the car can open, the passenger cannot get out of the vehicle. This will be treated as a medical entrapment and would require the activation of rescue arrangements. A similar scenario in which an uninjured person in an accident-damaged vehicle was unable to open the doors to exit and required intervention to exit the vehicle would also be classed as a rescue by confinement.

Regardless of the type of incident, a person does not need to be physically trapped by something to mean they require rescuing. The situation does not necessarily need specialist rescue tools to be classified as a 'rescue'. Similarly, the person does not necessarily need to be injured in any rescue scenario.

Scenario 3:

A bushwalker on a trail slips and falls, injuring their ankle and are unable to continue. They are about 200 metres from the nearest fire trail and need to be carried on a stretcher to a vehicle to be taken to a nearby ambulance. The NSW Ambulance have been called, who advised the NSW Police. The local rescue unit was contacted by the police to help in carrying the injured walker to the vehicle.

Many mines have workers in remote locations, both surface and underground operations. Even though an emergency response may only involve mine site-based resources, some incidents may be classified as a rescue, depending on the circumstances.

This may also be the case in situations before a response can be made. An example is when workers have sought refuge in an underground refuge chamber or fresh air base because of a seismic event or fire. They may be treated as trapped until they can be safely evacuated from the mine, or the situation is resolved. If there is any doubt, the NSW Police should be contacted and advised to decide on the situation.

The fire services

The NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW provide fire services within NSW. Both agencies have legislated functions and responsibilities for their roles, including powers of entry and investigation functions for fires.

Further powers of entry exist for matters relating to hazardous materials incidents and dangerous goods inspections. These statutory functions need to be understood and integrated into the mine's emergency plan to ensure the site-based response and notification arrangements are consistent.

Rescue agencies

Various agencies across NSW operate accredited rescue units in different areas, such as Fire and Rescue NSW, Volunteer Rescue Association, NSW State Emergency Service, NSW Ambulance, NSW Police and NSW Rural Fire Service. Any consultation or ongoing engagement and familiarisation between the mine and emergency services should include the accredited rescue unit for the area. In addition to accredited rescue agencies, the NSW Mines Rescue Brigade provides specialist rescue capabilities for all underground coal mines in NSW and may provide rescue services at other mines

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as a discretionary function. All coal mines must consult with the NSW Mines Rescue Brigade, in addition to other emergency services.

If the mine has not identified the accredited rescue unit for the area, contact the local NSW Police station. It is important to remember that any rescue unit activation in NSW is coordinated by the NSW Police, and not directly with the agency providing the service.

Ambulance

Details regarding contacting the Ambulance Service of NSW is adopted in mine emergency plans. It is important to ensure that mines consult with local ambulance station staff where there may be either a legislated need or site-based circumstances require that it should be done, such as obscure access locations or specific site risks, such as potential hazardous chemical exposures.



Another factor to be considered is resourcing and triage processes.

For an evolving event, where situation details may be scarce, it can be important for agencies to be aware of a 'potential' event, even if they are not immediately required. This will ensure resources are available to be deployed if needed. This is particularly important in regional areas, where travel time and limited resources can be a factor.

It is also important for mines with advanced levels of site medical care to still ensure the Ambulance Service of NSW is aware of serious injury responses by the mine. This will determine triage processes to allocate trauma patients to specific hospitals. The nearest hospital may not be the most appropriate destination.

The Coroner

The NSW Police conduct investigations on behalf of the Coroner for incidents involving fatalities. The notification to the NSW Police in these circumstances is well adopted in mine emergency plans generally and is required by the *Coroners Act 2009* (Section 35).

What is not well known is the Coroner's role in fires and explosions, even when no one is injured or killed (Section 30 Coroners Act 2009). The NSW Police may also investigate these events on behalf of the Coroner, and at times, do so in conjunction with investigators from the fire services, who also have powers of entry to investigate fires.

Suspicious fires or explosions, or any fire or explosion resulting in \$500,000 or more damage to property (including plant, vehicles and structures, etc) are typically reported to the Coroner, and these incidents should also be notified to the NSW Police.

Consultation is key

It is important to have discussions with emergency services. Mines and petroleum site operators must develop their emergency plan and associated notification processes with the awareness of the

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emergency services roles and responsibilities set out in the Code of practice for emergency planning for mines and the NSW Emergency Management Plan.

It is expected that agencies with responsibilities for specific incidents will be notified should an incident of their scope occur at the mine unless it has been discussed with that agency previously. Even minor events that can be resolved with site-based resources may still require notification to the agency with responsibility. If in doubt, talk with the relevant agency.

Mine and petroleum site operators are required to consult with emergency services in preparing their emergency plan (Section 92 Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2022).

The notification method

The most appropriate way of advising and/or requesting emergency services is through triple zero (000) for any rescue or other situation where there is risk to life or property or medical attention is needed. This enables multiple agencies to receive critical information simultaneously through their integrated dispatch systems.

The triple zero calls are also recorded, and time logged.

For non-urgent notifications, such as those not relating to a current incident, general enquiries should be directed to the relevant agency local offices or their respective general assistance numbers.

Contact

NSW Resources Regulator

Phone: 1300 814 609

Email: resources.regulator@regional.nsw.gov.au

Web: resourcesregulator.nsw.gov.au/safety/health-and-safety-management/emergency-planning

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