



Coal Mining  
Inspectorate,  
Department of  
Mineral Resources  
NSW

# SAFETY ALERT

Report No: SA98-03

File No: C98/2164

Date: 6 May, 1998

This Safety Alert has been prepared to provide all coal mines with the earliest possible advice of a **SERIOUS INCIDENT** so that appropriate immediate action can be undertaken at each mine to avoid any occurrence of a similar nature.

**SUBJECT:           PREMATURE IGNITION OF A SURFACE BLASTHOLE**

On Friday 1 May 1998 at an open cut coal mine in the Singleton District a charged and stemmed interburden blasthole was initiated when a bulk stemming vehicle backed out between two rows of blastholes and the front driver's side wheel entangled in the excess length of Nonel Exel Enduradet downline on the surface. As the vehicle swung out to reverse onto the access ramp the downline was stretched to a point where 3.5 metres of downline was broken off. This then created a 'snap initiation' and detonated the booster and explosive charge in the blasthole.

A shotfirer was approximately 9 metres away from the initiated hole attending to a lighting plant and the operator of the stemming vehicle was approximately 4 metres from the hole, with a third shotfirer approximately 50 metres from the hole when ignition occurred. All three men were very lucky to escape with minor injuries from the blast and resultant flyrock.

The initiated hole was the shallowest in the 173 hole pattern at 2.5 metres and contained 33kg of emulsion explosive product.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Minesites should review immediately procedures regarding vehicle access onto shot patterns when stemming and loading, particularly as regards proximity to blastholes.
2. Mines should review shotfiring standards particularly those relating to the handling of excess downline.
3. Shotfirer's are to be alerted to the dangers of handling Nonel downlines and to their susceptibility to 'snap initiation' when a broken end may strike metal and cause the initiating shock.

This incident is intended as a safety alert only. A more detailed Significant Incident Report shall be released when all details are known.

W R Flett  
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