

DATE: May 2018

## People warned of falling risks at opal mine shafts

Three recent incidents have generated significant concern regarding the implementation and use of safe systems of work associated with accessing and egressing from open shafts and shaft security in general at the Lightning Ridge opal fields.

Mine shafts present a hazard not only to mine operators who use them, but also to the general public who may walk unaware into a claim with an open shaft. Measures must be taken to ensure that people are prevented from falling down mines shafts and that mine operators and workers accessing the mine manage all foreseeable risks associated with accessing and egressing the mine via the shaft.

**Incident 1:** On Saturday 16 December 2017, a resident living near an unused shaft fell about 6 metres down the shaft. More than 24 hours passed before the resident was found and rescued.

**Incident 2:** On Sunday 29 April 2018, a claim holder/mining operator suffered spinal fractures when he fell to the bottom of a mine shaft while undertaking work on the ladder in the shaft.

**Incident 3:** On Friday 11 May 2018, a claim holder/mining operator fell down a shaft while using the mine shaft access ladder to exit the shaft. The miner suffered serious injuries including compound fractures to both ankles and a fractured femur.

**Photo:** The accident scene at the May incident in which a miner fell down a shaft.



## Issue

### Preventing falls down opal mine shafts for the general public.

While the NSW Resources Regulator does require a minimum standard for securing a mine shaft from the general public, the mine operator should be aware that this is a minimum standard only and further measures should be considered to secure the mine shaft from all public access. Less than the minimum standard is never acceptable.

## Preventing falls down opal mine shafts while accessing the mine

Mine operators accessing the mine via the shaft should ensure they have considered the risks and implemented measures to prevent falls. Where falling is not preventable, miners must implement measures that mitigate the impacts of a fall (such as the application of fall restraint/arrest systems).

## Recommendations

Mine operators must comply with:

1. The Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 Part 4.4 Falls:
  - o Clause 78 Management of risk of fall
  - o Clause 79 Specific requirements to minimise risk of fall
  - o Clause 80 Emergency and rescue procedures

Mine operators should consider:

1. The Model Code of Practice - Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces. See [Consider the Model Code of Practice - Managing the Risk of Falls](#)
2. Including in your 'fall from height' protocols provision for training and instruction in fit for purpose equipment to ensure it is properly stored, tested, maintained and discarded where appropriate.

### Mine operators must ensure the safety of the general public:

- Establish secure fencing around the shaft of the mine. Weather conditions and geological conditions can impact the stability of fencing and this should be considered when erecting a fence around a shaft.
- Cover the shaft with a lockable mesh cover.
- Ensure practical measures are taken to communicate the presence of a shaft using signs, visibility tape, ribbon or flags.
- Review the information available in the *NSW Opal Mining Safety Guideline* pertaining to shafts, including shaft protection/security.

### Mine operators must ensure the safety of operators who access/egress the mine using the shaft:

- The operator of the mine must minimise the risk of falling by providing adequate protection against the risk.
- The operator of the mine should provide adequate protection against the risk by providing and maintaining a safe system of work. This can be achieved by:
  - (a) providing a fall prevention device if it is reasonably practicable to do so, or
  - (b) if it is not reasonably practicable to provide a fall prevention device, provide a work positioning system, or
  - (c) if it is not reasonably practicable to comply with either (a) or (b), provide a fall arrest system, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- If a ladder is used for access it must be fit-for-purpose and regularly inspected.
- A working at heights plan should be developed that considers self rescue and emergency management

- Review the information available in the *NSW Opal Mining Safety Guideline* pertaining to shafts including ladders and shaft access.

**The regulator will:**

- implement an inspection program addressing shaft security and work at heights risk management for shaft access/egress systems
- update the *NSW Opal Mining Safety Guideline* and safety training packages with reference to these recent incidents.
- Based on the findings at each site, an inspector may issue:
  - improvement notices
  - prohibition notices.
- Penalties will be imposed for non-compliance with notice directions.

**NOTE:** Please ensure all relevant people in your organisation receive a copy of this safety bulletin, and are informed of its content and recommendations. This safety bulletin 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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