

SA17-09, July 2017

Longwall faces: safe access and emergency exits

This safety alert provides information and advice about providing safe access and exits from longwall faces. This advice is intended for the NSW mining industry.

Incident

The NSW Resources Regulator took compliance action last week at two separate underground coal mines, when inspectors identified situations where safe access and egress used by workers in operational longwall units were not maintained.

Figure 1. Safe access: At one of the mines, a crawl-way that was supposed to be installed was missing at the time of the inspection. This was required to be reinstalled as a direction in a prohibition notice issued to the mine operator.

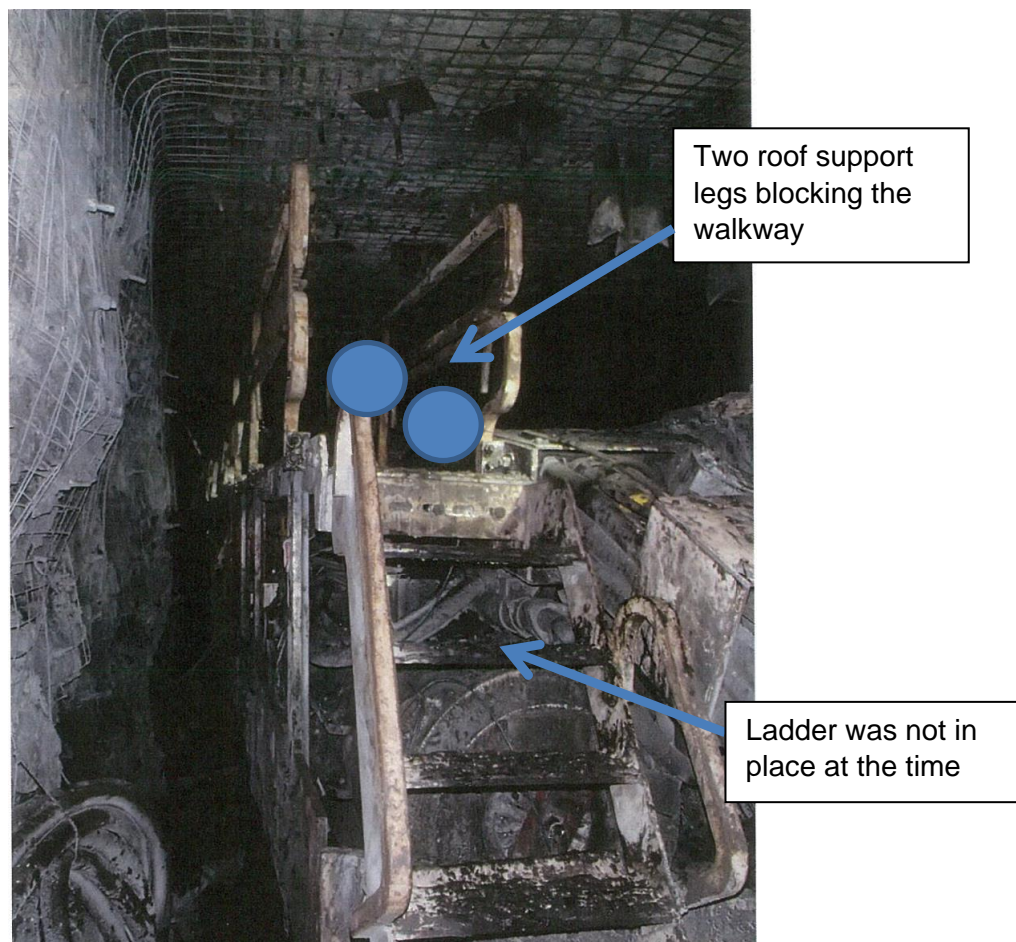


Figure 2. Impeded access due to temporary support



Circumstances

In both situations, there was no safe way available for people to walk alongside the main gate equipment. Both mines had failed to identify the risks associated with the loss of an exit and failed to implement remedial measures required by legislation (clause 96 Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014).

Investigation

Inspectors identified this issue during planned inspections at the two mines. The investigation established that workers had been using a less than adequate means of accessing and egressing the face, both with a high potential for personal injury. Furthermore, they were not suitable if required to be used as an emergency exit.

Section 195 prohibition notices were issued by the regulator, directing the mines to establish appropriate arrangements to ensure the provision of safe access and egress as required. Until the directions within the notices were met, access to the longwall faces was prohibited.

In each case, at the time of inspection workers were on the longwall face and it was apparent to the inspectors that the situation had existed for a considerable period of time.

Recommendations

In accordance with [clause 96 Emergency exits](#) under the Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014, exits must be accessible from all parts of the mine where coal extraction is taking place. Exits must be clearly marked so they can be easily accessed in the event of an emergency and must be maintained.

In the case of underground mines, workers must be able to escape and at least one of the exits should be suitable for use by a vehicle.

- Mines should review their documented arrangements pertaining to the provision of at least two emergency exits as set out in clause 96 Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Regulation 2014.
- In longwall operations, the alignment of maingate equipment within the maingate access heading is known to be dynamic. Documented procedures should address the foreseeable event of poorly controlled maingate equipment alignment altering the dimensions of an exit in a way that it no longer remains effective.
- At least two exits should always be available. If this is not possible, access should be prohibited until the situation is remedied, or additional controls are implemented.
- All workers should be made aware of relevant emergency exits, and the arrangements to be followed when at least two exits to the surface are unavailable.

NOTE: 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.

Go to resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/safety to

- find more safety alerts and bulletins
- use our searchable safety database
- sign-up to receive mine safety news.

Disclaimer

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 information on which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department of Planning and Environment or the user's independent advisor.

Office use only	
RM8 reference	PUB17/483
Mine safety reference	SA17-09
SAss	2017/02001, 2017/01957
Date published	26 July 2017
Authorised by	Dave McLean, Chief Inspector of Mines