

## Extractives sector can learn from others – MinEx

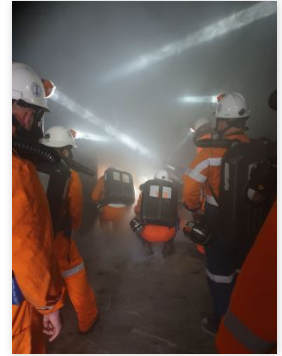
Colin Williscroft - Wed, 27 Sep 2023

Two workplace deaths, a serious injury and three high-risk incidents in just over a month may have occurred in other industries but the extractives sector can learn from those experiences, MinEx chair Joe Edwards says.

Lessons include the importance of risk assessment, understanding the levels of training required to fill gaps in knowledge that could potentially put workers at risk, and having failsafe positions – so that if something does go wrong, threats to worker safety are minimised.

Edwards says it's also important to ensure that if anything does go wrong, sites understand and learn from what has occurred.

He says MinEx – the mining and quarrying sector's health and safety council – keeps an eye on incidents in other sectors as it wants to be able to learn from their experiences.



### Incidents

While outside the extractives sector, the recent incidents are disturbing and a reminder of the risks that workers in many workplaces continue to face, Edwards says.

In late August a man died in an incident involving mobile plant at a Balclutha work site; the next day a person died in a Palmerston North logging yard after being hit by a vehicle.

Earlier in the month, two workers at a North Shore factory that handles solvents were overcome by fumes in a tank. Three firefighters came to their aid. All were taken to hospital and later discharged.

At the start of August, a worker at a West Coast demolition waste landfill was hospitalised in a critical condition after becoming overcome by fumes at the bottom of an excavation at the fill site.

In July, an Auckland construction site worker was crushed and severely injured by a reversing crane.

### Links, enclosed spaces

Edwards says there is a likely common link in those incidents.

"Work is not being properly planned nor adequately risk-assessed to keep people safe and fully aware of hazards.

"Crushing by vehicles remains a key cause of worker death across a number of sectors. You need training on how to assess those risks and manage them."

Edwards, who also chairs the New Zealand Mines Rescue Service, says risks multiply when workers are in enclosed spaces such as tanks and tunnels.

Any incident in a tunnel or underground mine longer than 150 metres requires a first response team on site. It also requires support from Mines Rescue, which has also been called to other incidents, such as Whakaari – White Island after the 2019 eruption.

### Mines Rescue

Mines Rescue has volunteer teams based at its headquarters near Greymouth, as well as Auckland and Huntly.

These and the underground mine rescue teams at OceanaGold's operations at Macraes near Dunedin and at Waihi are the only organisations outside the Defence Force that train and equip teams to use specialist long-duration breathing apparatus.

While Mines Rescue is only funded by levies on selected mines and tunnels, its expertise is utilised by organisations such as KiwiRail for specialised safety work and setting up its first response capability.

"Assisting businesses with emergency preparedness and on-site first response is an important service," Edwards says.

"You can't always rely on the emergency services who are stretched thin or may be some distance away due to the remoteness of a site."

### Training, procedures

Edwards says the pressure on Fire and Emergency New Zealand and other emergency services, as well as urban traffic delays, has increased the requirement for employers to ensure they have robust and tested emergency plans and first responders at work sites.

"All work sites need to have proper training and risk assessments so they understand what they might face, reduce those risks and be their own first responders if something does happen."

He says there needs to be more focus on prevention of injuries and harm, at the top of the cliff rather than rescues at the bottom.

That need has been "starkly and sadly illustrated in the last couple of months."