

December 29 2015

Help us find the quarries and improve safety

People across New Zealand are being asked to help locate unregistered quarries which may pose some of the highest health and safety risks to industry workers.

Chris Baker, chair of the Mining/Extractives sector Health and Safety Council, MinEx, says the industry had a bad year for fatalities in 2015 and wants to do all it can to avoid any repetition in 2016.

“We had four quarry industry fatalities in the past year and one in an alluvial gold mine. Two of those quarry fatalities occurred at small unregistered sites, where health and safety practices can sometimes be patchy to say the least.”

Mr Baker says MinEx and WorkSafe have been working to identify all the smaller quarries around the country – but many still remain off the radar.

“We know of around 500 registered quarries around New Zealand but there may be twice that many. These can present the most risk. Small unregistered quarries may be on the back of farms, forestry blocks or a rural property. While the owners may not be generating a lot of aggregate or lime, they still use machinery and sometimes explosives which demand proper health and safety practices by those working there.”

Mr Baker says there is some confusion about what constitutes a quarry, with many sites defined as quarry operations under health and safety law. Operators can assess if they meet the definition by visiting [Am I a Quarry Operator?](#) on the MinEx website - www.minex.org.nz

WorkSafe has recently produced the first-ever health and safety document for the quarrying and alluvial/opencast mining sector. It has been welcomed by MinEx as another step towards delivering on the goal of a fatality-free sector by 2020.

Seven health and safety forums were run by MinEx and WorkSafe around the country in 2015, attended by about 350 quarry and opencast mining operators. (Greymouth, Alexandra, Whangarei, Tauranga, Napier, Ashburton, Gore.) Forums for 2016 commence in Palmerston North in January.

“Many in the quarry industry are working to improve their training and lift health and safety standards,” says Chris Baker. “Unfortunately our biggest risks are posed by those who are simply unaware that new requirements may apply to them or are dragging the chain on what is necessary to keep people safe.”

Mr Baker says MinEx ideally wants any smaller unregistered quarries to identify themselves so they can be assisted to understand what is at stake.

“They need to know about the critical importance of looking after themselves and anyone working on a quarry. Just because you’ve operated for years with few accidents doesn’t mean it is safe. There are also new liabilities and penalties for operators under the Health and Safety at Work Act which comes into force in April.”

Anyone who owns or knows about the location of a smaller quarry which may not yet have been identified by MinEx or WorkSafe can email les@minex.org.nz or phone [0274 328 926](tel:0274328926)

* Chris Baker can be contacted for further comment on 027 240 6754. The attached photo shows L-R, MinEX chair Chris Baker, WorkSafe’s Chief Inspector Extractives, Tony Forster, and Aggregate and Quarry Association chair Brian Roche, at an event this month marking WorkSafe’s new Good Practice Guidelines for quarries and opencast mines – the first industry specific document on health and safety.