

Mine egress regulations cause concern

Cameron Massey - Fri, 06 Jul 2018

Confusion continues around the definition of a second means of egress from a metalliferous underground mine.

In the consultation document published last month on the review of the Health and Safety at Work Mining and Quarrying Operations Regulations 2016, officials recognise “there has been some genuine confusion” regarding the requirements of the regulation.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has specifically asked for feedback on the standard needed for egress from underground metalliferous mines.

As it stands, the regulation requires underground metalliferous mines to have two exits ‘trafficable on foot’, or one plus a shaft. MBIE says this was based on Queensland provisions for non-coal mines to have two trafficable exits, although the state does not specify ‘on foot’.

MinEx chief executive Wayne Scott says the ‘trafficable on foot’ is the problem.

“We’ve asked for a discussion around what ‘trafficable on foot’ means. We want that defined.”

Different risks

The requirement stems from the Pike River mine disaster, where Scott says it was clear there was no effective second means of egress.

Metalliferous mines don’t carry with them the same levels of risk as underground coal mines where methane explosions are a real consideration.

“Traditionally metalliferous mines have had escapeways and rescue chambers,” Scott says.

Often workers in an underground metalliferous operation will take shelter during an emergency and wait until the all clear is given.

Scott suggests having a second means of egress that is trafficable on foot is superfluous to an underground non-coal mining operation.

“Typically, a lot of underground metalliferous operations work off a single drive and shafts - which are used for ventilation and as a second means of egress.”

Time limit

OceanaGold, the country’s only underground mine operator, uses ladders as its second means of egress.

Charged with overseeing the implementation of the Royal Commission’s recommendations, the Pike River Implementation Team left it to WorkSafe and industry to develop guidance to determine whether the ladder met the regulation.

MBIE says the current view is that the ladder “is non-trafficable on foot in the event of an emergency”.

This means OceanaGold will have to upgrade its second exits at Frasers Underground and Waihi mines, and MBIE is seeking feedback on the idea of a transitional period to December 2024 to have this done.

It considers that any transitional period would need to be shorter than the 10 years provided for coal, “as there has already been an opportunity for the operator to improve its exits.”

Scott, however, believes this is unnecessary and could be a sticking point for the review.

“We’ll be putting up arguments that we are as safe as any underground metalliferous mines elsewhere in the world operating under similar legislation.”

OceanaGold

The gold miner says technology has moved on in the five years since the regulations came into effect in response to the Pike River tragedy.

“There are changes that we think are needed to bring the regulations up to date,” an OceanaGold spokesperson told *Inside Resources* today.

“OceanaGold will be taking part and assisting in every way we can to make this an effective review process.”



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Factfile information

Organisation [OceanaGold](#)

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