



## MinEx Newsletter October 2020

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### Truckloads of training on offer

Winter is behind us and hopefully the worst health effects of Covid-19 – though that’s much less certain than the passage of the seasons.

One thing that is clear is that we have the biggest set of training initiatives ever seen in this country.

A recent count showed no fewer than 17 different training programmes including for the first time some serious funding for employers to take on apprentices and trainees. This can provide up to \$16,000 a year to an employer. There’s also funding if you want to switch an employee into another role which requires new skills. And of course, the no fees policy means a trainee pays zip.

We know that poor training is one of the major causes of health & safety issues, not to mention an impediment to improved productivity. So I urge you to have a look at the Government’s website <https://www.connected.govt.nz/> which details all the training options.

Another great set of support is through [MITO](#) our industry training organisation. MITO’s really stepped up since COVID-19 and is providing good backup for employers who take on trainees including regular site visits. MITO is also supporting apprentices who get caught with any company collapse. This month it unveiled [70 scholarships](#) for 2021 across a range of early and mid-career opportunities.

Meantime, MinEx is working with MITO to bring together a workforce development strategy, as required for the reforms of training and vocational education which will truly start bedding in next year. So, there is a lot happening and a lot on offer for both workers and bosses in our sector.

Meanwhile, MinEx continues its work across the gamut of health and safety issues.

Our Board meeting this month looked at proposed new exposure standards for arsenic and Chromium 1V which are just plain unworkable. The MinEx Board agreed with my proposal - the best way to implement these is by a tri-partite body – not by WorkSafe issuing ‘stretch targets’ which can be beyond what is measurable. Have a look at my comments and those of some of the Board on this issue.

Interestingly, Safe Work Australia is recommending an eight-hour time-weighted average exposure of 0.01 for arsenic – a hundred times higher than NZ standards. As you will read, Queensland is moving to introduce free compulsory lung health checks for all extractive workers. Frankly, that’s a better investment than impossible to measure worker exposure levels. An earlier MinEx Board meeting saw industry veteran Joe Edwards raise concerns about a number of incidents where buckets have fallen off excavators. No injuries have been reported but as we know, one of these often follows from the near misses, so we cover that issue in this MinEx newsletter.

Enjoy the reading and the information provided as a break from your other duties.

And as ever, stay safe through spring’s storms and sunshine.

**Wayne Scott**  
CEO  
MinEx & AQA

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## **Tri-partite group suggested for worker environment standards**

MinEx is proposing the establishment of a tri-partite group to look at the implementation of standards on the exposure of workers to potentially harmful minerals and chemicals.

Wayne Scott, CEO for MinEx (the health and safety council for extractives) says the idea has emerged amid a further round of submissions on proposed new Worker Environment Standards (WES) which MinEx is once again opposing.

WorkSafe is currently testing proposals to reduce the WES for arsenic from 0.05 milligrams in a cubic metre of air to 0.001mg /m<sup>3</sup>, and to reduce the Biological Exposure Index (BEI) from 35 ug/l to 10 millionths of a gram in a litre of urine sample.

There are also proposals to reduce the exposure level for Chromium VI. A major source of worker exposure to Cr(VI) occurs during "hot work" such as welding on stainless steel and other alloy steels containing chromium metal. Cr(VI) compounds are also used as pigments in dyes, paints, inks, and plastics and as an anticorrosive agent in paints, primers and other surface coatings.

WorkSafe’s proposal is to reduce the exposure level for Chromium VI from the current WES of 0.01mg/m<sup>3</sup> to 0.00002mg/m<sup>3</sup>, a level at which WorkSafe acknowledge “there are no available analytical methods that would allow determination of airborne levels of Chromium VI at the proposed WES values.”

Wayne Scott says WorkSafe is repeating the same approach it took a year ago with Respirable Crystalline Silica – reducing allowable levels below what can accurately be measured. He says New Zealand’s occupational hygienists were against lowering the arsenic levels because they were so low that operations would spend more time arguing the results rather than concentrate on controls to mitigate exposure. Another risk of having very low and potentially unmeasurable limits is that they are just ignored. “WorkSafe

acknowledges it can't measure chromium VI at the proposed levels. As for the arsenic levels it's proposing, the problem is it's below the natural levels of arsenic that about half the population can have at any one time."

He says smokers are one group that are likely to fail any new BEI test as well as anyone who has eaten seafood in the previous couple of days. "The proposed WES of 0.001mg/m<sup>3</sup> is significantly lower than any other jurisdiction in the world, including those with considerably more data and analysis of occupational exposure impacts."

Countries with copper smelters or those where drinking water had high levels of arsenic were much more likely to see high arsenic take-up than what emerges from controlled dust in a mining environment.

Safe Work Australia is recommending an eight-hour time-weighted average exposure of 0.01 – a hundred times higher than here.

MinEx Board chair Chris Baker says WorkSafe is adopting 'stretch targets' rather than those which are able to be monitored and enforced with today's knowledge and technology. "That would work if we couple those stretch targets with a program of improvement that is pragmatic and achievable."

Wayne's proposal to establish a three-way group of WorkSafe, unions and employer/industry representatives with a brief to develop that program was well-received by the MinEx Board's September meeting.

Fiona Bartier from Bathurst Resources says the new WorkSafe limits are showing a focus on the numbers rather than risk controls. "It's preferable that there is a key focus on worker engagement and education around the use of appropriate risk controls rather than enforcement of levels we cannot measure."

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## **Rocks on your head if you get too close**

Don't turn blasting operations into viewing events is the message everyone can take on board after a spectacular mishap in New South Wales.

The mishap at the Albury Quarry has been reconstructed by NSW regulators and already features in a MinEx Safety Alert but it's worth watching again even if seen. Have a look on the video below.

In short, the Quarry Manager, who had no shotfiring experience or qualifications, invited his partner and friends to watch the explosion, being carried out by a shotfiring contractor.

A haulage truck operator who happened to be on site also joined the party and some of them moved forward 45m from the established zone to be just 275m from the blast site. Several utes and an excavator were struck by football size rocks. Most of those present were forced to take evasive action to avoid being struck and it's little short of a miracle no one was injured.

The regulator noted everyone should have been at the quarry's front gates and non-essential people banned.

I've watched many blasts, by reviewing film footage rather than being physically within site of the shot. These are times of critical health and safety risk, not public spectacles.

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## Dangerous blasting incident at Albury Quarry

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### Lung checks now required in Queensland extractives

From the start of this month, all mine and quarry workers in Queensland are required to take free lung health checks to prevent exposure to diseases such as respirable crystalline silica.

The checks were announced by Queensland Mines Minister Dr Anthony Lynham who says as a doctor he knows early detection not only helps prevent diseases but can help stop them progressing. “Every Queensland worker has the right to safe working conditions and peace of mind.”

The checks involve chest x-rays and lung function tests and are available to people who have left the extractive sector as well as every new worker, and at least once every five years for existing workers.

Queensland’s Labor Government has introduced the checks as part of a package of health and safety reforms for mine and quarry workers including a mobile health service for lung checks and a health support service.

Another element has been industrial manslaughter laws which can see senior company officials sent to jail for negligence.

The Queensland administration also commissioned the Brady [report](#) into health and safety in the extractive sector.

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### This is not one for your bucket list

Several recent incidents involving excavator buckets coming loose from their quick hitch should prompt the extractives industry to review its practices, says an industry veteran.

Joe Edwards raised the issue at a recent meeting of the MinEx Board, the health and

safety council for extractives, of which he is a member.

MinEx itself issued a [July Safety Alert](#) which reported a bucket falling from an excavator.

A locking pin was not inserted in the quick hitch and when lifting the bucket and slewing at the same time, the excavator propelled the bucket five metres towards a nearby worker, luckily missing them and no-one was injured.

Joe says that won't always prove the case and recalls that the earlier models of quick hitch had two locking devices to secure the bucket; the in-cab control and either a wedge or pin on the quick release.

He believes some modern systems have electronic locks in the cab and there have been cases where they have been inadvertently released, allowing the bucket to disconnect. There also seems to be a trend not to install the safety wedge or pin.

"It's an issue and I know of a number of incidents; that means processes should be reviewed by excavator operators. The machines should have two forms of release devices – one is clearly not enough at times."

Joe has been made aware of an incident in London, where a bucket was lost down a tunnel shaft. Fortunately, despite the potential for a calamity, no injury occurred. He says the uncontrolled release of a bucket from a quick hitch is becoming all too common.

Another issue he has observed is the potential for excavators to be used beyond their capacity when undertaking lifting operations because the excavator lift ratings charts don't include the weight of the quick hitch; these in themselves can weigh half a tonne or more.

WorkSafe has a [fact sheet](#) on using quick hitches safely. This reminds people that site managers are responsible for ensuring excavator and backhoe operators are trained to safely operate equipment, including using quick hitches.

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## Message from the New Zealand Mining Board of Examiners

It is now five years after the issuing of the first certificates of competences in the new regime and consequentially the New Zealand Mining Board of Examiners (the Board) and Secretariat are currently experiencing a heavy workload of renewal applications. This will continue into the first quarter of 2021. As well, there is a backlog of new applications due to COVID-19 complications.

We can assure you WorkSafe understands the situation and will show tolerance to CoC holders and potential CoC holders who have submitted a new or renewal application.

Receipt of your application will be acknowledged, however you will most likely not hear from us (unless there is an issue with your application) until you receive notification of your oral exam or receive your new or renewed certificate in the mail. This may take some time. Please don't contact us to follow up unless it is urgent.

The Secretariat is attempting to schedule as many oral exams as is practicable in November to accommodate a backlog of new applications. New applications received from now on will most likely not be scheduled for an oral exam until February 2021 and onwards.

The Board and the Secretariat ask for your patience and support during this time. They recognise the importance of CoCs to the industry and are doing their best to facilitate the best outcome in challenging circumstances.

### **Are your contact details with the Secretariat up to date?**

The New Zealand Mining Board of Examiners' Secretariat sends reminders to Certificate of Competence (CoC) holders who are due to submit a renewal application via email only. They use the email address submitted with the CoC application.

It is the responsibility of the CoC holder to ensure the Secretariat holds up to date contact details including an email address.

**If the Secretariat does not hold an email address for you or holds an incorrect one you will not receive any important updates and reminders to renew your CoC.**

Contact the [Secretariat](#) to ensure they have your correct contact details and encourage all your fellow CoC holders to do the same.

### **2015 CoCs Expire this Year**

Email the Secretariat at: [BoE\\_secretariat@worksafe.govt.nz](mailto:BoE_secretariat@worksafe.govt.nz) to check it has the most up to date contact details so you can receive important information and renewal reminders.

CPD requirements for CoC holders changed on 1 Feb 2020 – find out more at: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/extractives/cocs-and-cpd/continuing-professional-development/>

Subscribe at: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/home/subscriptions/> to ensure you receive any extractives industry and BoE updates.

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## **Harness unit gives mobile fall protection**

We've all got to do our bit to buy local in these times, especially when it supports good health and safety practices. So, hats off to Dunedin firms Enex and Site Weld NZ who have partnered up to produce a mobile fall protection unit.

John Rawlings of Site Weld says it was developed for an existing New Zealand customer who needed safe access for short periods to carry out regular inspection and maintenance work on large pieces mining machinery.



“It has since also been supplied into Mongolia for mining operations. There are similar products but our unit has a unique feature allowing it to be moved using its inbuilt pallet pump truck; you can then park a vehicle wheel or piece of heavy equipment on this to use as the counter balance.”

The device ensures complete fall safety with no trip hazards while providing 360-degree movement up to 6.3m of height. For more details contact [john@siteweld.co.nz](mailto:john@siteweld.co.nz).

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