

SAFETY ALERT

Hand injured by fall of drill rods

INCIDENT

A contract driller had two fingers amputated when drill rods fell unexpectedly from the roof and hit his right hand. The incident occurred at Myuna Colliery.

CIRCUMSTANCES

The drillers on the job had just completed a vertical interseam drill hole and started recovering the rods. At the time of the incident, the hole depth was about 44 m.

During the process, there was a lack of clearance for the drill rod so a shorter rod was installed from the top of the chuck. As the shorter rod was installed, the operator activated the gripper jaws on the chuck. This released the gripper jaws at the top of the mast that were holding the drill rods in the roof, causing them to fall. The drill rods hit the operator's right hand, which was placed on the drill chuck.

Figure 1: The Radco drill rig that fell on the worker's hand. Photo supplied by the mine.



INVESTIGATION

An investigation into the incident found that while in automatic drilling mode, the drill rig has a safety feature whereby a set of gripper jaws are activated at all times to stop the rig's drill steels from falling out of the roof. The gripper jaws are activated at either the chuck or the top of the drill mast.

The drill rig was still in automatic mode at the time of the incident; however, the operator activated the gripper jaws during installation of the rod causing the gripper jaws to release.

It is not common practice to drill vertical holes using the type of drill rig used by the operator. This type of drill rig is predominantly used for horizontal in-seam gas drainage holes.

The drill operator was experienced at operating the drill rig, but this was the first time he had used it to drill a vertical hole.

The drill operator's off-sider did not have strong experience using the drill rig or in drilling vertical holes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When processes are modified mine operators and mining contractors should undertake a thorough change management process that includes:

- identifying new hazards arising from the change
- assessing any change in risk
- implementing additional controls (if needed)
- training and communicating with any workers affected by the change
- monitoring the effectiveness of controls.

NOTE: Please 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.

Issued by

Dave McLean

Chief Inspector of Mines

Appointed pursuant to Work Health & Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Act 2013

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