

Safety Alert

Mines Inspectorate—All mines

Safety Alert No. 279 | 13 December 2011

Park safely to prevent uncontrolled vehicle movement

What happened?

A coal exploration drilling rig and support vehicles were travelling in convoy through level terrain between drill sites. There were cattle in the immediate area.

An automatic Toyota Hilux twin-cab vehicle in the convoy had just passed through an open gate when a nearby cow tried to follow the vehicle through. To prevent the animal's escape, the driver pushed the gear shift forward, intending to park the Hilux, and jumped out to block the animal.

Once the driver was out of the cab, the vehicle started to creep back toward the gate opening. His immediate reaction was to push against the tailgate, calling the driver of an accompanying vehicle to help stop the vehicle. He had to hold the moving Hilux for about a minute before help arrived.

Although no one was injured, there was potential for the runaway vehicle hitting, running over or pinning a person against a stationary object, such as a gate or fence.

Why did it happen?

In his rush to stop and to get out, the driver had pushed the gear shift forward into Reverse, rather than Park.

Additionally, he left the engine running, didn't apply the hand brake and left the driver's door open as he alighted—an ineffective method of securing a vehicle when parking or alighting.

This incident has some similarities to a September 2008 fatality: a water-truck operator with a coal exploration crew was killed by being crushed against a steel gate by an out-of-control reversing water cart. (The prime cause in that incident was a faulty park brake.)

Recommendations

While the driver's motives were well intentioned, his actions put his own and others' safety at risk.

Mine and exploration sites:

- must have effective parking procedures for light vehicles
- must ensure that these are regularly communicated, monitored and enforced.

Alighting from a vehicle before ensuring it is stable is a high-risk activity that can be easily controlled.

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