

# Mines Safety Alert 304

## Fatal accident in an irrespirable atmosphere

### What happened

A fatal accident occurred at an underground coal mine when a coal mine worker appears to have been overcome by an irrespirable atmosphere. He had attempted to enter a part of the mine that was being inertised (when a sealed section is filled with inert gas to reduce the risk of gas explosions and fires). To do so, he opened a hatch that had been closed, but was not clearly marked as inaccessible.

### Comments

Investigations are only in the preliminary stage, but this tragedy and a number of other incidents in recent times have identified inadequate controls being used for dealing with access to hazardous areas of a mine.

The other incidents involved:

- an ERZ Controller entered an area of a mine while it was being inertised with boiler gas
- a senior official and a ventilation officer investigated a fixed gas monitor alarm by walking towards increasing levels of gas while their personal gas monitors were also alarming.

Issues which have been identified in these incident investigations include:

- the effectiveness of barriers to hazardous areas
- the provision of appropriate signage warning of the nature of the hazard in the area
- the provision of sufficient and accurate information to people who have to work near these hazardous areas
- the need for people to be accompanied when carrying out certain tasks.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that each coal mine conduct an audit of all such hazardous areas and ensure that these areas are:

1. secured to prevent inadvertent access
2. signposted as to the nature of the hazard and as an area where entry is prohibited
3. accurately depicted on plans and other relevant documents and that this information plus a familiarisation is provided to any person who has to work adjacent to these areas.

Great state. Great opportunity.



Authorised by **Chief Inspector of Coal Mines** | Andrew Clough

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**Place alert on noticeboards and ensure relevant people in your organisation receive a copy.**

See more safety alerts and bulletins at <http://mines.industry.qld.gov.au/>

And the hazard database at <http://mines.industry.qld.gov.au/safety-and-health/publications-guides.htm>

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