


Miners jump for their lives

ANGLO American is under pressure to improve safety at its Queensland operations following a string of serious incidents.

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ANGLO American is under pressure to improve safety at its Queensland operations following a string of serious incidents, including the rush of a one-metre wall of water through Grasstree Mine.

It is understood three miners were forced to climb onto machinery to get out of the path of the water as it gushed through the underground mine, flowing from a nearby open-cut pit that had filled with water during the floods.

The Mines Inspectorate is still investigating the incident, which the CFMEU described as a “near fatal disaster” similar to the NSW's Gretley mine tragedy in 1996 where four miners died when water inundated the mine.

The potentially fatal disaster at Grasstree Mine, in Middlemount, on January 20 came after two other serious incidents at the mine in November.

An employee lost four of his toes after his foot was crushed by a longwall shield on November 15, and a week later work stopped at the mine due to a frictional ignition of a small parcel of gas.

A month later, on December 18, a contractor at Anglo's Foxleigh mine, near Middlemount, was killed when the tyre he was changing exploded.

The incidents prompted workers at all Anglo sites, exploration hubs and its Brisbane corporate office to stop operations on February 28 to examine Anglo Metallurgical Coal's safety performance and how it could be improved.

More than 3000 employees and contractors attended the "Stop and Prop" safety sessions, which Anglo says were designed to kick start a major safety campaign to address safety incidents at its Metallurgical Coal sites.

CFMEU industry health and safety representative Chris Gilbert said the union had serious concerns about Anglo's recent safety record.

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“We are watching all Anglo's mines', particularly Grasstree, operational safety procedures and policies,” he said.

Mr Gilbert, who went out to Grasstree Mine shortly after the incident, said the three men working underground were lucky to escape with their lives when 36mega litres of water inundated the mine. He said they were later offered counselling.

“It was extremely fortunate,” Mr Gilbert said. “The area was only inspected by mine management and workers about half an hour prior to the water going through.”

A Mines spokesman for the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation said investigations into the incident weren't complete. He said the Chief Inspector of Coal Mines had planned to visit Grasstree Mine this week; but that had been postponed due to more urgent operational priorities.

The spokesman said the Inspectorate was waiting for Anglo to advise of the final conclusions of its investigation and what actions it would propose to ensure there was no repeat of the incident.

An Anglo spokeswoman said it had increased pumping capacity at the mine's surface to intercept potential floodwater and to manage water levels. She said work had begun on the construction of two underground water seals to isolate the working areas of Grasstree Mine from the risk of water ingress.

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