

Safety concerns after underground fire at Qld's Moranbah North coalmine

By Jenae Madden and Liam O'Connell

ABC Tropical North Mining and Metals Industry

Wed 2 Apr 2025 at 11:45am



The Moranbah North mine is 200 kilometres south-west of Mackay. (ABC Tropical North: Liam O'Connell)

In short:

Mining at Moranbah North has been suspended after an underground coal fire.

The mine's owner Anglo American says conditions are now stable and monitoring of the underground environment will continue.

What happens next:

Resources Health and Safety Queensland inspectors are on site to investigate the cause of the explosion.

The state's peak mining union says workers fear for their safety after a fire at a central Queensland underground coal mine this week.

It was previously reported the Moranbah North coal mine was evacuated on Monday afternoon due to [dangerous levels of carbon monoxide](#).

However, new information suggests it was likely to be an explosion.

Queensland Mining and Energy Union Industry safety representative Jason Hill said the incident was alarming.

"The industry is living on luck with the number of incidents we're having at the moment," Mr Hill said.

"No-one was hurt, which is a is a good thing. But we're also relying on luck — and luck is running out."



Jason Hill says workers are nervous about their health and safety. (ABC Tropical North: Liam O'Connell)

The mine, which is 200 kilometres south-west of Mackay, is currently owned by Anglo American. It was [shut down in 2021 due to high gas readings](#).

It is also 15km from the company's Grosvenor coal mine, which [remains closed after an underground explosion in June 2024](#).

Mr Hill said workers were nervous about the number of mine incidents and felt concerned for their health and safety.

"If you have a fire underground you can blow the whole mine up and you can ... lose multiple lives.


"Any fire underground is a very serious event and the potential you know ... as we've seen with the Moura Number 2 mine."

In 1994, 11 miners died during an explosion at [Moura Number 2 mine](#), one of three fatal incidents at the Moura Mine since the 1970s.

Re-entry suspended

Mining industry regulator Resources Safety Health Queensland (RSHQ) has suspended re-entry to Moranbah North.

"Information to date suggests it's likely an explosion has occurred within the mine," Acting Chief Inspector of Coal Mines Laurie Crisp



He said RSHQ inspectors were on site assisting Anglo American to understand the cause of the event and put relevant controls in place to ensure the safety of staff.

"The number one priority for our inspectors is always the health and safety of workers on site," he said.



The entrance to Moranbah North Coal Mine, in Queensland's Bowen Basin. *(ABC Tropical North: Liam O'Connell)*

The mine was evacuated at 3pm on Monday when high levels of carbon monoxide were detected.

Anglo American said data indicated a small, contained ignition occurred in the goaf, the area left behind after coal has been mined.

The spokesperson said the ignition did not spread to the longwall face, the wall of coal being mined.

"We activated our action response plan after elevated carbon monoxide readings were detected in the goaf.

"Goaf conditions normalised shortly after the incident occurred and remain stable. Monitoring of the underground environment is continuing."

Concerns about workforce's future

Moranbah North is among four Bowen-Basin mines that Anglo American has [sold to Peabody Energy in a \\$5.7 billion deal](#) due to be finalised later this year.

The company says it is briefing the workforce, and all employees and embedded contractors would continue to be paid.

"Our next steps are working with RSHQ to investigate the incident and to then work towards re-entry and restart once it is safe to do so," a Anglo American spokesperson said.

But union safety representative Jason Hill said job security concerned workers.

"What is the plan in the future? Especially if the mine can't establish mining operations before the Peabody Corporation takes over," he said.



Isaac Regional Council Mayor Kelly Vea Vea says workers' safety should be a priority. (ABC Tropical North: Jenae Madden)

Isaac Regional Council Mayor Kelly Ve'a Ve'a said the incident was a stark reminder of the dangers in the mining industry and safety needed to be the focus of every shift.

She said as ownership of Anglo American coal mines transferred to Peabody Energy it was important to have the safety of workers at the forefront of the transaction.

"There is always a nervousness when incidents occur," Cr Ve'a Ve'a said.

Get a morning news briefing in your inbox

Subscribe to our ABC NewsMail bringing you breaking news from overnight, plus a heads-up on the stories that will shape your day.

Enter your email address

Subscribe

Your information is being handled in accordance with the [ABC Privacy Collection Statement](#).

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Posted Wed 2 Apr 2025 at 11:45am