

MAJOR INVESTIGATIONS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE UNIT

INFORMATION RELEASE

Fatality

Incident date	13 December 2016
Event	Worker dies after being struck by truck tailgate
Location	Rix's Creek Mine, Singleton NSW

Overview

A worker was struck by the steel tailgate of a truck when he attempted to climb into the trailer under the tailgate while it was suspended to clean out residual material. He suffered fatal head injuries.

Photograph 1: Truck showing trailer and tailgate



The mine

Bloomfield Collieries Pty Ltd operates Rix's Creek Mine located five kilometres northwest of Singleton, NSW. The mine is an open cut mining operation that uses a range of heavy earthmoving machinery for removing overburden and coal.

The nearby coal handling and processing plant (CHPP) processes the coal, with the product coal taken across the mine site by truck to a train loader for transport to Newcastle.

The haulage contractor

The product coal is transported by a contract haulage company, RW & LM Simmons, which operates four trucks on the haulage route at the mine. The round trip between the CHPP and train loader takes about 19 minutes.

The product coal is transported five days a week over two 12-hour shifts that operate from 2.00 am to 2.00 pm.

The incident

The incident occurred about 9.30 am on 13 December 2016.

Three trucks were transporting product coal from the CHPP to the train loader. The fourth truck was not operating as it required maintenance.

During the morning, it was identified that residual coal and material had built up in the trailers of the trucks and needed to be cleaned out.

Rather than using water to wash out the trailers, as had been the usual practice prior to that time, the task was undertaken manually.

The first truck was parked near the CHPP at 8.15 am with the trailer in the horizontal position.

The deceased worker and two colleagues of the haulage contractor went to the rear of the trailer where the worker used a shovel to lever the tailgate open after the tailgate latching mechanism was released. The two colleagues then lifted the tailgate high enough to allow the worker to prop the tailgate open using a pipe spanner (refer Photo 2).

The worker then climbed into the trailer by accessing it under the suspended tailgate and broke up the residual coal and material with the shovel. The task was completed in about 15 minutes.

Photograph 2: Steel pipe spanner and shovel



The second truck returned to the CHPP about 9.15 am where it underwent the same cleaning process used on the previous trailer.

The worker's colleagues lifted the tailgate and held it while the worker placed the pipe spanner in place to prop open the tailgate.

As the worker attempted to climb into the trailer, the pipe spanner moved unexpectedly allowing the tailgate to fall and strike the worker's head.

The worker suffered critical head injuries.

The worker was flown to the John Hunter Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery and was placed in an induced coma. He later died as a result of his injuries.

The investigation

A Mine Safety inspector and NSW Police responded to the incident immediately.

The Resources Regulator's Major Investigations and Emergency Response Unit also responded and began an investigation to determine the cause and circumstances of the incident.

The mine operator and contractor are cooperating with the investigation.

An investigation report will be prepared for the Secretary of NSW Department of Industry and the NSW Coroner.

Safety observations

The safety of people working on and around plant and equipment is paramount.

Falling plant and equipment pose a serious risk to health and safety and require appropriate control measures to prevent an object from falling.

Workers should not undertake any work underneath suspended and unsecured plant and equipment.

Plant and equipment should be cleaned at fit-for-purpose washing facilities that eliminate the need for persons to work underneath suspended and unsecured plant and equipment.

Fit-for-purpose access and egress points should be used to access plant and equipment. Trailers and truck trays should have safe access points.

The *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)* and *Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Act 2013 (NSW)* require duty holders to identify and manage risks to health and safety of workers at mines. There are also duties for the provision and maintenance of safe plant, safe systems of work, information, training, instruction and supervision that are necessary to protect all workers from risks to health and safety arising from work.

There is specific legislation about preventing objects from falling in the workplace. Persons conducting businesses or undertakings should review clauses 54–55 of the *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 (NSW)*.

These duties are applicable to persons conducting businesses or undertakings that operate or control plant and equipment at mines and petroleum sites.

There are also specific duties that apply to persons conducting businesses or undertakings that design, manufacture and supply plant and equipment.

Further information

Information on falling objects, though not specific to truck tailgates, is available at:

- SafeWork NSW [Falling Objects](#) – this webpage provides practical tips on preventing dangers of falling objects and the specific laws about preventing objects from falling in the workplace
- Work Safe Australia [Falling Object Fact Sheet](#) – this fact sheet provides general guidance for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) and workers on managing risks to health and safety posed by falling objects.
- SafeWork NSW [Heavy Vehicles or Trailers Hitting or Crushing Workers](#) – This safety alert highlights the risks of workers being hit or crushed when working on heavy vehicles and trailers.

About this information release

The Resources Regulator has issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a fatality in the mining industry. Investigations are ongoing and further information may be published as it becomes available.

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Industry, Skills and Regional Development or the user's independent adviser. All photographs were taken by the Major Investigations and Emergency Response Unit.

Information about the Major Investigations and Emergency Response Unit and its publications can be found at: www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/miners-and-explorers/safety-and-health/major-investigations

For information about health and safety regulation for mine sites contact a mines inspector at one of our local offices www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/miners-and-explorers/safety-and-health/mine-safety-offices

Issued by:

Steve Orr
Manager Regulatory Audit and Investigation
Major Investigations and Emergency Response Unit
NSW Resources Regulator