

Extractive Industries Inspectorate

Promoting Safety and Health in the Extractive Industries

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT ALERT

13 January 2004

Miners Overcome by Petrol Fumes Underground

Incident

The incident occurred in the workings of an old gold mine in New Zealand's North Island. Two miners were carrying out support work to make the access tunnel safe for an exploration programme.

On the morning of 15 December they were using a small loader with a petrol engine to muck out a fall of ground some 800 metres in from the portal. The loader operator collapsed unconscious and his workmate, who was also seriously gassed, managed to reach the portal and raise the alarm before he too collapsed. Only the swift efficient rescue effort prevented a disaster, and both miners have since fully recovered.

Initial site inspection has established that two other machines being used in the immediate vicinity at the time were also powered by petrol engine.

Prevention

- Only diesel internal combustion engines should be used in underground mines and tunnels.
- The ventilation system must deliver a reliable supply of fresh air in a quantity at least sufficient to ensure that the standard for 'fresh air', as set out in the Health and Safety in Employment (Mining - Underground) Regulations 1999, is maintained. Use of exhaust scrubbers and catalytic converters will help achieve compliance with this requirement.
- Regular airflow measurements and gas monitoring must be carried out.