



Dust monitoring in NSW – key learnings from the coal face

Sydney (Australia), 29 August 2016

The Australian coal mining industry has proudly maintained an enviable health and safety record. The cases of coal workers pneumoconiosis (commonly known as black lung disease) in Queensland are a sobering reminder that dust-related disease is not a thing of the past. The re-emergence of this disease has heightened the call for further vigilance and rigour around the Australian coal industry's prevention and control strategies.

Coal Services' Managing Director/CEO, Ms Flemming said the robust nature of the NSW legislation, combined with the diligence of dust monitoring and environmental standards in NSW coal mines, is instrumental in protecting mine workers' health and keeping black lung disease at bay.

'Our unique collaborative model includes all stakeholder groups, including workers, employers, community and government,' Ms Flemming said. 'Preventative measures carried out by Coal Services, such as periodic health surveillance, chest x-rays, education and personal dust exposure monitoring, have also helped to ensure the health and safety of NSW coal industry workers.'

Under the *NSW Coal Industry Act 2001*, Coal Services is responsible for independently executing the State's government Orders 34, 40, 41 and 42. This involves working with coal mining companies on safety training, dust mitigation and control technique, and health surveillance. Dust monitoring results are reported back to industry and government departments. Coal Services, through the Standing Dust Committee (SDC), also maintains an overview of all the results of the dust monitoring programme. The committee reviews all dust exceedances including the contributing factors, and the pursuant reviews and actions taken and results of resampling triggered by the exceedance. This process helps drive exposure levels downwards.

Ms Flemming said 'The prevention of black lung disease in NSW to date is a testament to the unwavering vigilance and collaborative efforts of not only Coal Services in executing the Orders, but also the work of the Department and their Inspectorate, Industry Safety and Health representatives, and compliant employers and workers.'

She reaffirmed that Coal Services health surveillance practices and other monitoring and detection processes have supported the health and safety of NSW coal workers.

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‘We remain confident in our current practices and are committed to continuous improvement. This year, CS Health has also undertaken two independent reviews and formed relationships with other health industry bodies which have verified the strength of our systems.’

‘We encourage any worker, current or retired, who has concerns about their health to contact their nearest Coal Services office. Even after leaving the industry, workers are entitled to attend for health assessments at CS Health where they may be referred for a chest x-ray.’

Mark Shepherd, Coal Services Occupational Hygiene and Compliance Manager, explained that dust monitoring is more than just taking dust samples in the mine.

‘Our approach is very much focused on prevention. We accompany the work crew underground to conduct the dust sampling. This also allows us to observe work methods and the dust control strategies that are in place. We can then report more than just the sampling results. Our independent observations, including contributing factors to any dust level exceedance, are shared with industry to drive improvement.’

Mr Shepherd stressed that any exceedance is a cause for concern and said that it highlights that the hard work undertaken by industry to minimise airborne dust-related health risks must continue. In 2015, Coal Services conducted 2,817 personal respirable dust samples across the NSW coal industry. This includes all underground, open cut and coal handling preparation plants with only 27 exceedances. The average exposure level remains well beneath the occupational exposure limit which is a credit to the NSW industry.

‘At Coal Services we use every exceedance to drive discussions with mine management and support operations to improve their dust control strategies. We take the time to educate workers one-on-one, advising them on suppression techniques, where to stand to minimise exposure and appropriate respirator selection. If we can help workers to make smart choices about dust, then we are helping to make a difference,’ he said.

The Standing Dust Committee revised the ‘Dust Book’ that was first published by the Joint Coal Board in 1966. The 7th edition [*‘Protecting against airborne dust exposure in coal mines’*](#) will be launched today (Monday, 29 August) at the NSW Minerals Council conference in the Hunter Valley. This book is an example of the Committee’s focus on providing tools which support continuous education, and reinforce the importance of workers making good decisions on the coal face. The book will be available in both hard-copy and as a pdf on the Coal Services website.

In closing Ms Flemming said, ‘We must lead by example and ensure that every decision we make ensures that the eradication of this disease is maintained, and that protecting our workers and ensuring they are free from occupational illness and disease is at the core of all decision making, policy and actions.’

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Fast facts:

- Coal Services is an industry-owned organisation committed to providing critical services and expertise to the NSW coal mining industry. Our two shareholders are the NSW

Minerals Council and CFMEU.

- Our Specialised Health and Safety Scheme helps employers to identify and manage occupational risks through a suite of health, safety, environment and insurance solutions.
- Coal Services has statutory functions, as outlined within the *NSW Coal Industry Act 2001*. These functions include, but are not limited to, the provision of workers compensation, occupational health and rehabilitation services, the collection of statistics and the provision of mines rescue emergency services and training to the NSW coal industry.
- Order 41 (health surveillance) is administered by CS Health, a business unit of Coal Services.
- Orders 40 (Abatement of Dust on Longwalls) and 42 (Monitoring Airborne Dust) are administered by Coal Mines Technical Services, a division of Coal Services' Regulation & Compliance business unit.
- The Standing Committee on Dust Research and Control, established in 1954, is an expert advisory body comprising representatives of the colliery proprietors, mining unions, industry specialists, government departments and Coal Services medical and engineering personnel.

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About Coal Services:

Coal Services is an industry-owned organisation committed to providing critical services and expertise to the NSW coal mining industry.

We operate a Specialised Health and Safety Scheme that provides an integrated suite of services aimed at preventing injury and illness in the workplace. These services help employers to identify, assess, monitor and control many risks inherent in the NSW coal mining industry.

Our preventative and responsive services in the areas of occupational health and safety, workers compensation, mines rescue and training help to deliver on our purpose 'to protect'.

We are jointly owned by two shareholders, the NSW Minerals Council and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). Our purpose, vision and values are aligned to focus on the safety and health of our industry and its workers.

Please visit: www.coalservices.com.au