



Coal Services

Standing Committee on Airborne Contaminants and Occupational Hygiene

Strategic Plan to 2028

Standing Health Committee Strategic Plan to 2028
July 2026

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Foreword

Coal Services is committed to the health and wellbeing of workers in the New South Wales (NSW) coal industry.

The Standing Committee on Airborne Contaminants and Occupational Hygiene (the Standing Dust Committee, SDC or committee) has operated since 1954 as a tripartite committee bringing together representatives from industry, unions, the regulator, and independent experts. The committee provides oversight, shares knowledge, and supports improved health outcomes for coal workers.

This strategic plan outlines the direction and focus areas for the SDC over the 2027 and 2028 financial years. The priorities identified address the most significant airborne contaminant risks facing the industry and the ways in which the committee can most effectively support industry improvement.

The SDC has identified the following priority focus areas:

- Preparation for workplace exposure standard changes
- Practical exposure control
- Proactive site engagement

The SDC will play a key role in analysing data, developing practical guidance, sharing leading practice, and supporting sites to improve their management of airborne contaminants. The committee's work will be guided by a risk-based approach, ensuring that limited resources are focused where they will have the greatest impact on worker health outcomes.

To deliver effectively on these priorities, the SDC is also strengthening its own governance, collaboration, and communications practices.

Lucas Boyne

Chair
Standing Dust Committee

Standing Committee on Airborne Contaminants and Occupational Hygiene

Role and function

The SDC is a sub-committee of the Coal Services Board of Directors. The committee has operated continuously since 1954, making it one of the longest-standing collaborative bodies in the Australian mining industry.

The SDC brings together representatives from:

- Coal Services (Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, and technical expertise)
- Department of Regional NSW (NSW Resources Regulator)
- Mining and Energy Union (MEU)
- Mine Managers Association of Australia (MMAA)
- NSW Minerals Council
- Independent experts.

The committee operates as a tripartite body, leveraging the unique structure of NSW's Coal Services model to create a trusted, neutral space for collaboration and data sharing. The SDC uses data to proactively guide, support, and influence industry action. It is not an audit or compliance body; its role is to inform and enable, not to enforce.

Purpose

To drive the continuous reduction of exposure to airborne contaminants and improvement in occupational hygiene across the NSW coal industry. The committee pursues this purpose through proactive guidance, data-informed engagement, and collaborative influence across the industry.

Functions

The SDC fulfils its purpose through:

- Monitoring the results of nominated hazard sampling and evaluating results
- Identifying hazards which may present health issues for the industry
- Providing guidance and education to support control of nominated hazards
- Communicating with industry through bulletins, forums, and targeted engagement
- Providing advice to the regulator on matters affecting airborne contaminants.

Guiding principles

The following principles guide how the SDC pursues its purpose and makes decisions.

Evidence-based and risk-informed

The SDC grounds its priorities and recommendations in data. Decisions are informed by monitoring, health surveillance, and research to understand where risks are greatest and where effort will have the most impact.

Independent, trusted, and neutral

The SDC operates as an independent body within the NSW Coal Services model, creating a trusted space where stakeholders can share information openly and engage constructively. This neutrality is protected as a strategic asset.

Collaborative, leveraging collective influence.

The SDC harnesses the combined knowledge, networks, and influence of its members, not only within the committee itself, but also through members who actively use their reach to drive outcomes across their respective stakeholder groups.

Inform and guide, not enforce

The SDC operates through influence rather than authority. It creates visibility through transparent reporting, provides guidance and practical support, and equips those with decision-making authority to act.

Outcomes-focused, advocating best practice

The SDC measures its success by improvements in worker health and safety. The committee translates data into practical action, captures and shares lessons learned, and actively promotes practices that demonstrably reduce exposure.

Proactive and forward-looking

The SDC strives to anticipate emerging risks and prepare the NSW coal industry for future challenges, supporting prevention over reaction.

Strategic Plan FY2027 to FY2028

The SDC's purpose is to drive the continuous reduction of exposure to airborne contaminants and improvement in occupational hygiene across the NSW coal industry.

In working towards this purpose, the SDC draws on data from Coal Services' monitoring and health surveillance programmes, evidence from research, and the practical experience of committee members across industry, the regulator, unions, and independent expertise. The committee also reviews leading practice from other jurisdictions and industries.

The SDC has reviewed the key health and safety issues for the coal industry in relation to airborne contaminants and has identified the following priority focus areas for FY2027–FY2028.

Scope

The SDC's Charter covers all airborne contaminants and occupational hygiene. This strategic plan focuses the committee's effort on crystalline silica, diesel particulate matter, and welding fume as the highest-priority contaminants based on health risk, regulatory context, and available data. This is a deliberate scoping decision that will be reviewed annually based on emerging evidence and risk assessment.

Priority focus areas

The SDC has identified the following issues as its priority focus during the term of this strategic plan:

1. Preparation for workplace exposure standard changes
2. Practical exposure control
3. Proactive site engagement

The SDC will play a key role in analysing data, developing practical guidance, and supporting sites to improve their management of airborne contaminants. The committee's work will be guided by a risk-based approach, ensuring that limited resources are focused where they will have the greatest impact on worker health outcomes.

Preparation for workplace exposure standard changes

Workplace exposure standard (WES)/workplace exposure limit (WEL) reductions have been implemented in recent years for silica and welding fume, with a further reduction for diesel particulate matter (DPM) scheduled to take effect on 1 December 2026.

The committee has identified the following contaminants as priority focus areas due to their potential to significantly impact worker health risk management and regulatory compliance across the NSW coal industry:

- Respirable crystalline silica (RCS)
- Diesel particulate matter (DPM)
- Welding fume

DPM is the FY27 focus given the upcoming 1 December 2026 reduction, with the committee establishing a baseline understanding of RCS and welding fume exposure performance over the same cycle. RCS remains a significant ongoing risk given current exposure levels and exceedance rates across the industry and will be a focus for future cycles.

By proactively focusing on these contaminants, the committee aims to support industry preparedness for regulatory change and strengthen control practices across NSW coal operations.

Initiatives

In focusing on this priority, the SDC will:

- monitor and communicate WES/WEL changes to industry as they are confirmed
- analyse available industry data to identify highest risk exposure groups, tasks, contributing factors, and WES/WEL change compliance impact for priority contaminants
- analyse available site-level data to identify highest risk exposure groups, tasks, contributing factors, and WES/WEL change compliance impact for DPM, alongside baseline
- analysis for RCS and welding fume.

Practical exposure control

The industry invests significantly in contaminant exposure controls; however, valuable insights and successful control approaches often remain siloed within individual companies or operations.

The SDC is uniquely positioned to identify leading practice and facilitate the sharing of practical knowledge across the NSW coal industry, enabling sites to learn from each other and make more informed control decisions.

An existing repository of leading practice resources has been established, and this priority will expand and strengthen that foundation.

Initiatives

In focusing on this priority, the SDC will:

- develop and publish practical guidance on exposure control measures, including methods for validating control effectiveness
- identify and document case studies from sites with effective controls to share practical examples of what works
- expand the existing online repository to host SDC guidance, case studies, and research in a centralised and accessible platform
- facilitate knowledge sharing across operations, including targeted sessions where site representatives share effective control practices to an industry audience
- host solution providers to present innovative exposure control technologies and approaches to the committee
- monitor and share relevant developments from other jurisdictions, industries, and international sources.

Proactive site engagement

This priority focuses on identifying where support is most needed, delivering targeted engagement, and reaching the decision-makers who can drive change. Central to this approach is building and maintaining trust.

Engagement principles and confidentiality provisions will be established upfront to protect the SDC's trusted space and ensure sites are willing to participate openly.

Initiatives

In focusing on this priority, the SDC will:

- use data analysis findings to identify sites needing support, including those facing challenges with proposed exposure standard reductions
- provide site-specific benchmarking analysis to help sites understand their performance relative to industry
- engage with priority sites to offer assistance, leveraging industry networks (MMAA, NSW Minerals Council) to reach site leadership
- document outcomes and lessons learned from engagements to inform future guidance and support.

Strengthening how the SDC works

To deliver effectively on these priorities, the SDC is also strengthening its own governance, collaboration, and communications practices. The committee recognises that achieving more strategic, proactive outcomes requires changes to how it operates.

Key areas of focus include:

- adopting a risk-based strategic approach, using available data and industry intelligence to identify where the greatest risks lie and direct the committee's efforts accordingly, supported by an annual planning cycle and a three-year horizon for strategic plan refresh
- producing an annual industry analysis report assessing the progress and status of dust management across the industry, informed by data and key performance indicators
- strengthening collaboration between members by redesigning meeting structures to support forward-looking discussion and joint priority-setting, and working more closely with the NSW Resources Regulator on data review and joint industry initiatives
- improving the reach and impact of SDC communications, ensuring that practical guidance and insights reach the people who need them most across the NSW coal industry.

Conclusion

This strategic plan outlines the SDC's priority focus areas for reducing worker exposure to airborne contaminants and improving occupational hygiene outcomes for the NSW coal industry.

Stakeholders should recognise the need for continued improvement in priority areas and commit to active participation in improvement strategies. The SDC's unique position, bringing together industry, unions, the regulator, and independent expertise in a trusted, neutral space, creates opportunities for collaboration that would not be possible elsewhere.

The ambitions in this plan represent a significant shift from how the committee has traditionally operated. Successful implementation will require realistic assessment of resourcing and capacity, phased delivery that builds momentum through early wins, and regular progress reviews with willingness to adjust priorities based on what is learned.

The SDC will oversee the implementation of the strategic priorities and provide the Coal Services Board and industry with regular updates on its progress. This plan is designed as a living document: progress will be reviewed at six-monthly intervals, with adjustments made as circumstances, evidence, and priorities evolve.

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