

ADDRESSING MINING SAFETY AND HEALTH CULTURE ISSUES

As the State Mining Engineer said in his regular contribution, “Simon says”, one of the key messages from the 8 April 2011 industry workshop was the need to develop a resilient safety culture from boardroom to frontline, regulator to industry, employer to employer — and recognise the champions. This confirms the Government’s safety reform vision of a proactive safety regulator working with industry to create an environment in which “resilient” safety cultures are the norm, with companies, workers and the wider community confident that industry is operating as safely as possible.

Resources Safety is committed to supporting industry as it makes the necessary cultural changes, and has established a focus group to specifically address mining safety and health culture issues. Many factors influence workplace culture, but the group is targeting five main areas where the regulator can facilitate positive outcomes:

- gendered behaviours (i.e. toughness in mining);
- bullying;
- mental wellbeing;
- fatigue; and
- consultation and communication.

Safety and health representatives are also critical to the development of a resilient safety culture, but their particular needs are being addressed by another focus group.

Resources Safety will raise awareness of the issues across industry by:

- publicising leading practice (i.e. champions) in *MineSafe*;
- sourcing and developing practical guidance material and self-assessment (i.e. audit) tools; and
- providing opportunities to gain practical knowledge and share experiences through its annual roadshows.

Traditionally, mining occupational health and safety has centred on engineering and safety management systems, and the “people” part of the safety equation has been somewhat neglected. This is now being redressed and

Resources Safety, through the focus group, is doing its part. The three areas presently receiving attention are described below.

In 2010, Dr Dean Laplonge ran workshops for Resources Safety’s roadshow series, exploring toughness in the workplace. His report on the workshop and recommendations is available from the publications section of the website. With his assistance, the focus group is developing a series of information sheets on gendered behaviours and their effect on workplace culture.

Another project underway at Resources Safety aims to:

- improve the process for handling bullying complaints;
- ensure operators understand the obligation to deal with bullying allegations in the workplace; and
- ensure complainants are aware of what is involved in lodging a complaint and proving a bullying allegation.

Mental wellness is the third area of focus and has traditionally received little attention in the mining industry. However, as in the wider Australian community, mental health issues can significantly affect safety performance and productivity, both directly and indirectly. To paraphrase the World Health Organization’s definition of mental health, a resilient safety culture is best developed and maintained when individuals are able to:

- realise their own abilities;
- cope with the normal stresses of life;
- work productively and fruitfully; and
- make a contribution to their workplace.

To make positive cultural changes will require a serious examination of mental health and practical ways to enhance mental wellness, including where people do not have a diagnosable condition. The Australasian Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health will be running a workshop session during the 2011 Mines Safety Roadshow series to raise awareness of this topic, and looking at how mental health can be addressed in occupational health and safety policies and practices.