

# Vulnerable workers in the NSW mining industry

## Vulnerable workers face increased health and safety risks

The purpose of this profile is to bring to the attention of the NSW mining industry the existence of vulnerable workers and the health and safety issues associated with them.

Vulnerable workers are not 'on the radar' of many employers within the industry. This is despite an over-representation of vulnerable workers in fatalities and injuries.

Vulnerable workers are defined as those who may not receive equity, access, participation or rights to work and as a result face discrimination and an elevated health and safety risk.

Vulnerable workers include:

- New employees
- Contractors
- Employees with tenuous employment contracts (i.e. part-time and casual workers)

Contractors or employees with tenuous employment contracts may be employed with less job security and employment safeguards than permanent employees.

Contractors are generally less experienced and less familiar with the workplace, environment, other workers and work procedures. They also may be engaged in high risk areas.

In the NSW mining industry vulnerable workers are primarily new employees and contractors. Ensuring their on-going health and safety may require specific management strategies.

## Contractors account for half of the NSW mining industry's fatalities

Contractors account for half of all fatalities in the NSW mining industry between 2001/02 and 2006/07 and almost a third of all serious bodily injuries involved contractors.

Given that contractors are working up to 35% of the hours worked on coal mines, they face a significantly elevated fatality risk.

In coal mines 4 out of 5 fatalities in the same period were contractors.

## Twenty percent of fatalities and serious injury cases are inexperienced workers

Between 1999/2000 and 2008/2009, 20% of fatalities and serious injury cases in the NSW mining industry involved employees with less than one year's experience.

## Vulnerable Worker Snapshot

- Contractors accounted for 50% of all fatalities and 30% of all serious bodily injuries between 2001/02 and 2006/07.
- Contractors are used in many NSW mines and carry out 30 - 35% of the work.
- 20% of fatalities and serious injury cases involved employees with less than one year's experience.
- 30% of NSW mines employ part-time workers and 17.5% employ people under the age of 20.

## How can we improve the safety of vulnerable workers?

### Vulnerable workers need specific management strategies

Vulnerable workers may be more exposed to risk than other workers. Table 1 shows some of the general and specific risks associated with vulnerable workers. Specific strategies such as increased supervision, tailored training and information and workplace or job re-design may be required to ensure their health and safety.

Table 1: Health and safety issues of vulnerable employees

	Poor access to hazard information and training	Lack of control – inability to influence decisions/to speak up	Specific “vulnerabilities”
Inexperienced workers	✓	✓	Shift work Musculoskeletal Psycho-social (bullying) Inexperience
Tenuous employment	✓	✓	Stressors associated with sub-contractor status Contractors work longer hours

## How many vulnerable workers exist in the industry?

### Vulnerable workers are a significant part of the industry’s workforce

The Wran Review into Mine Safety reports that contractors work approximately 30% of hours in the NSW mining industry. This is supported by preliminary data from injury reports.

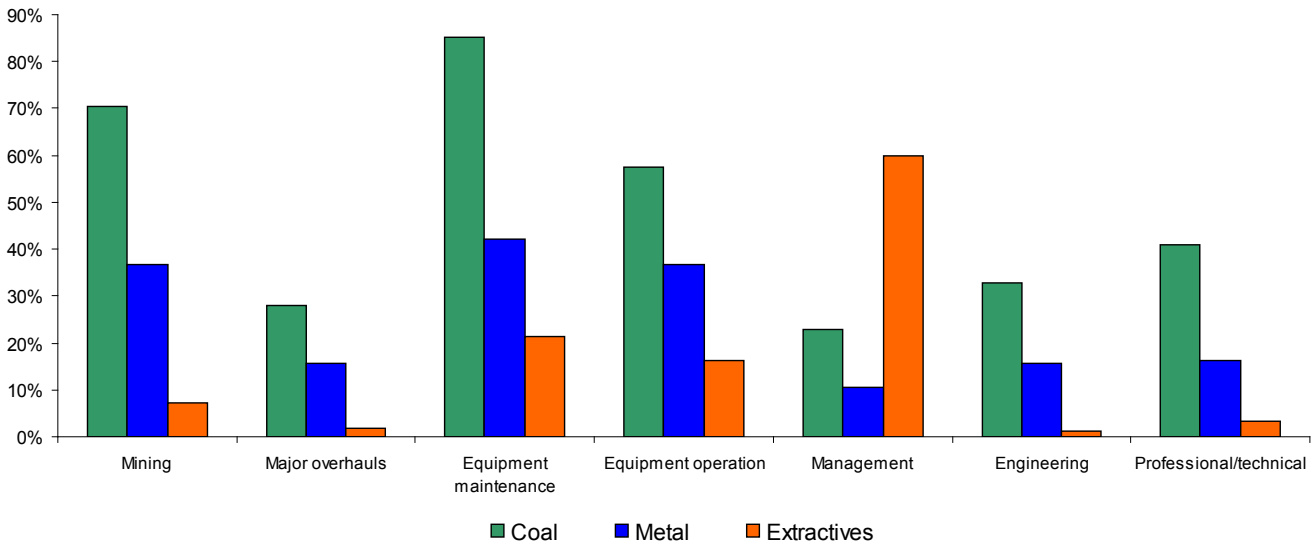
The Digging Deeper census data shown in Graph 1 highlights the proportion of NSW mines that are using contractors in a variety of common settings.

The Census of Mines\* conducted as part of the Digging Deeper project in 2007 identified 17.5% of NSW mines employed workers under the age of 20 (this included 30% of coal mines, almost 50% metalliferous mines and 12% of extractive mines).

The Census of Mines also identified that 30% of NSW mines employed part-time workers and 34% employed casual workers, however part-time work is relatively uncommon in the NSW mining industry with part-timers representing only 7% of the total workforce in 2006.

Metalliferous and coal mines have the lowest proportion of part-timers at 5% and 6% respectively. Data also suggests that part-time work decreased in all NSW mining sectors from 2001 to 2006.

Graph 1: %NSW Mines employing contractors

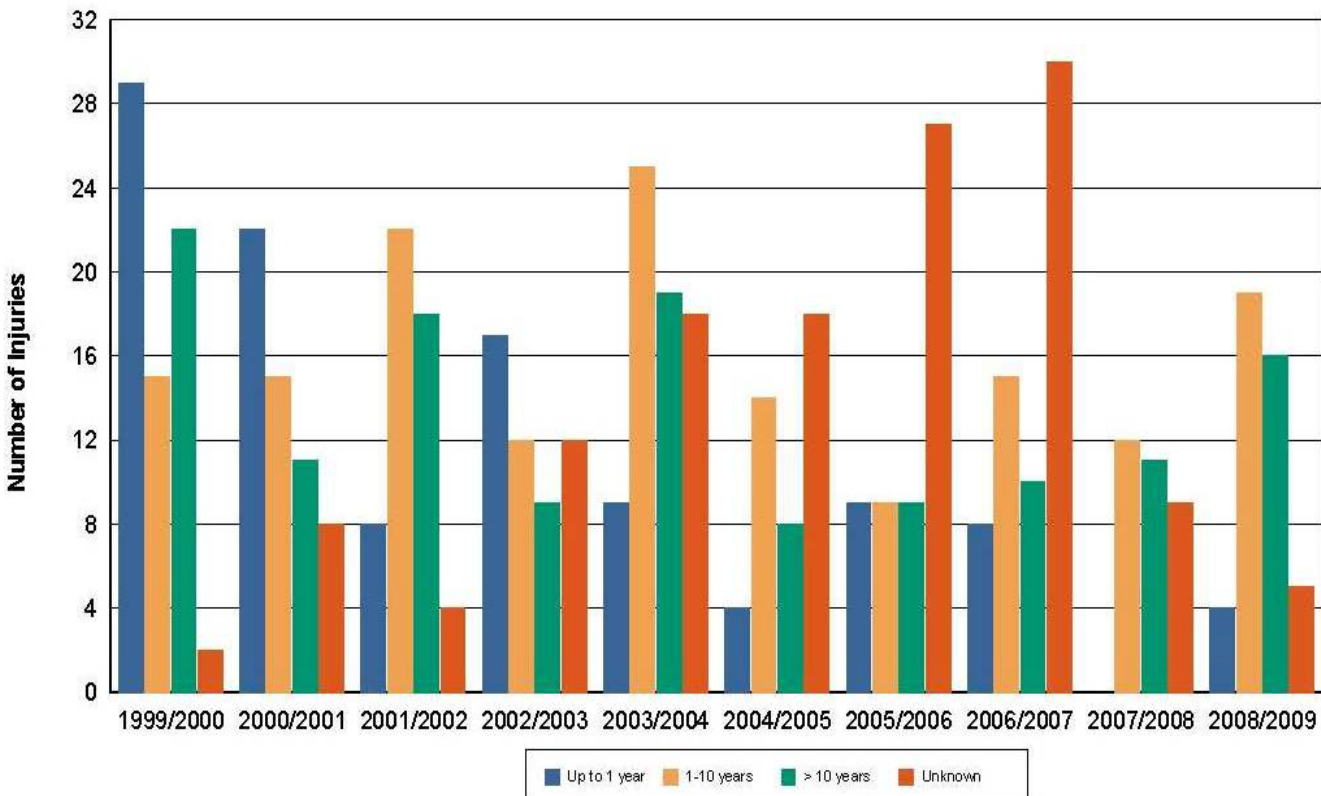


## What is the industry experience of vulnerable workers?

Twenty percent of fatalities and serious injury cases are inexperienced workers

The Industry & Investment NSW Mine Safety COMET database records the experience (in years) of workers injured for fatalities and serious injury cases. This data shows that 20% of fatalities and serious injury cases in the NSW mining industry between 1999/2000 and 2008/2009 have involved employees with less than one year's experience.

Graph 2: Industry experience of fatalities and serious injury cases reported in the COMET database for each year.



# What are we going to do about it?

## Mine Safety Advisory Council

The NSW Mine Safety Advisory Council and Industry & Investment NSW has published a Contractor OHS Assessment Tool to assist mines in assessing a contractor's OHS performance before engaging them for work. Industry & Investment NSW has also published two Guidance Notes on the implementation of mining legislation with respect to contractors .

The NSW Mine Safety Advisory Council will also promote the needs of vulnerable workers and integrate strategies into Industry & Investment NSW's Assistance Unit's education and assistance program and World-leading OHS communication strategy for the NSW mining industry.

### Tool

- Mine Safety Advisory Council and I&I NSW Contractor OHS Assessment Tool

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/resources/tools>

### Guidance Notes

- Industry & Investment NSW Guidance Note on Contractors for Coal Operations – GNC-012

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/263093/GNC-012-Contractors.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0005/263093/GNC-012-Contractors.pdf)

- Industry & Investment NSW Guidance Note on Contractors for Metalliferous and Extractive – GNM-004

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/269766/GNM-004-Contractors.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/269766/GNM-004-Contractors.pdf)

### References/further reading

Other profiles in this series include:

- Manual handling and musculoskeletal claims in the NSW coal industry
- Musculoskeletal disorder claims in NSW metalliferous and extractive mining sector.

### For more information go to

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minesafety](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minesafety)  
or e-mail: [mine.safety@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mine.safety@dpi.nsw.gov.au)

Unless otherwise stated all data in this report is drawn from data provided by NSW WorkCover and Coal Services Pty Ltd.

\* Independant consultant report by Shaw Idea, commissioned by NSW Mine Safety Advisory Council.



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