

SAFETY ALERT



MAJOR EXCAVATOR FIRE AT OPEN CUT COAL MINE

INCIDENT

A major fire occurred on a large hydraulic excavator in an open cut coal mine, resulting in substantial damage to the machine.

CIRCUMSTANCES

The excavator was stripping overburden when there was a loud explosion, and a fire started which quickly burned the two engine compartments and operator's cab.

The machine operator escaped after turning the engine off and operating the manual switch for the on-board fire suppression system. Any delay in his escape may have resulted in injury.

The fire suppression system did not activate.

INVESTIGATION

The cause of the fire is not yet known and investigations are continuing.

The on-board fire suppression system is one which is commonly used on large earth moving machines in open cut coal mines.

Investigations indicate that the manual initiation switch had been operated. Sensor lines were also installed for automatic actuation of the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Assess ability of installed fire suppression systems on mobile earth moving equipment to be manually actuated to discharge the system.
2. Ensure that emergency escape procedures applicable to the occurrence of a fire cover the hazard to the operator in the event of the fire suppression system's failure to discharge.

NOTE: MDG 13, "Guidelines for fire-fighting systems for the surface mobile and transportable equipment", provides information that may be of assistance in conducting any assessment.

For further information contact Ray Leggett, District Inspector, Singleton, on 6572 1899 or 0408 424 126.

R Regan
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SAFETY OPERATIONS