

Training to Manage Emergencies in Coal Mines

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A coal mine emergency requires vast amounts of data to be managed, scenarios to be evaluated and decisions to be made to safely recover the situation. This must be achieved whilst managing employee, community and legal obligations with differing priorities to those necessary to control the event. A structured and well understood process and the utilisation of appropriate technological support to aid decision making from data is essential to achieving the best possible result in such a situation.

Queensland Mines Rescue Service (QMRS) conducts mine emergency management systems (MEMS) training for coal mine operators. This system provides a central decision making authority, a process to conduct necessary planning and scenario evaluation, and management of resources for action implementation.

From 2011 QMRS has made available to industry a decision making assistance program called MRAS (Mine re-entry assessment system) that can give the person tasked with incident management confidence that hazards can be controlled based on available information.

MEMS develops actions during an event by setting objectives at each stage to focus on 'What is Important Now'. As planning evaluates a response and operations implement the required actions each objective is met and the event moves forward. MRAS allows actions to be tracked and hazard status to be reviewed on an ongoing basis as well as the generation of automated reports and status updates as required. This capability reduces the demands and distractions on the incident controller. The MEMS process has recently been adapted to the control of surface mine incidents and would readily integrate to non-coal emergency management.

Australian legislation and operating practice leaves the control of an emergency event with the mine personnel. The people who will be called upon to take on critical roles within an emergency management system, such as MEMS, must become familiar with and comfortable in working within that system. Whilst the initial training course provides a familiarity with the process, quality lower level event simulations that utilise the same systematic approaches must be utilised to reinforce the learning of that initial training.