

HAZARD ALERT BULLETIN

Gas Inundation of a Strip Mine

On June 16, 2003, during removal of overburden, two openings into an abandoned underground mine were encountered. Work continued without incident the rest of the shift. No one worked at the site the following day. On June 18, an MSHA inspector arrived to inspect the mine. Finding no miners in the general area, he drove into the pit where his government vehicle stalled and could not be re-started. When the inspector exited the vehicle, he became light-headed and experienced tightness in his chest. The inspector was able to walk out of the pit and telephone the field office supervisor who immediately dispatched another inspector to the site.

An investigation of the area was conducted using detection equipment. Oxygen readings, as low as 9.3 percent, were found in the pit. To protect persons from entering the affected area, the access road was barricaded and a red closure tag was placed on it identifying the hazard. An Order was also issued. The operator was contacted by telephone and notified of the condition and action taken.



BEST PRACTICES

- When old mine openings are encountered, stop all work. A qualified person, using the proper equipment, must examine the area before any further work takes place. Record results of the examination, including all hazards identified.
- If hazardous conditions are found, evacuate all persons until the conditions have been corrected.
- As soon as practicable after discovery, back fill mine openings encountered.
- Develop a plan that addresses examinations for gases, under what conditions to evacuate, and procedures to follow to correct the conditions when (surface) mining near known abandoned underground workings.