

Success Story: Safety Systems at Mine Save Workers



Safety professionals often use “scare tactics” to convince management of the need to implement certain safety procedures or invest in safety equipment, or to get workers to comply with company safety rules. You know what I mean – “If you don’t follow our machine guarding policies, you could lose a hand just like this guy did!”

I pass no judgment here—We at the *Insider* are guilty of doing the same thing. And this technique *can* be effective—up to a point. (For more on the most effective ways to communicate your safety message, see this series by Fred Leafloor, President and Principal Consultant for Safety First Industrial Safety Services.)

So let’s try another tactic and instead of talking about how a worker got injured or killed and a company fined because its OHS program failed, let’s look at a safety success.

Rock Slide Tragedy Averted

The open pit part of the Diavik Diamond Mine in the Northwest Territories has two separate safety systems. The first is a radar system that constantly scans the pit walls, looking for any sort of rock movement. The secondary system, called a total optical survey, also sends out an alert when it detects moving rocks.

On Aug. 4, the first alarm system at the mine went off, indicating some rock movement. At the time, only two workers were in the pit and they immediately evacuated. About an hour later, the secondary alarm system also went off.

The mining company monitored the pit and about 10 hours later, about 5,000 tonnes of rock fell about 10 to 12 metres into the area where the workers had previously been working. The amount of rocks that fell was significant and would be considered a fairly large rock slide.

But because of the advanced warning, no one was injured and no equipment was damaged during the incident. As Corey McLachlan, the mining company’s acting manager, community and external relations, “It was an example of the reason you have these safety systems in place and how well they can work.”

The pit didn't reopen until Aug. 21. In addition to continuing to monitor the area for any additional rock movement, the company had workers:

- Only work in the pit during the day
- Knock off all loose rocks from the sides of the pit
- String heavy-duty mesh on the exposed rock.

Use this story as an example of how a company's investment in not one but two safety systems paid off by protecting workers and equipment.

Another example of how you can use a safety success story to convey your safety message is by telling management about cases in which companies were able to successfully argue that they exercised due diligence. (Here's an example of a briefing on such a case that you can give to senior management.)