

C. Roles and responsibilities

Regulating the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme

As the entity responsible for regulating the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme, the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME) has implemented many initiatives in partnership with industry, unions, and other government entities. This approach appropriately reflects the shared responsibility for implementing improvements to the Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme. It may also be used in addressing broader health implications for workers in other industries, and emerging occupational dust lung diseases such as silicosis.

Coal mine operators

Coal mine workers are protected under the Queensland Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme (the scheme).

Under the scheme, employers (including coal mine operators and labour hire companies) are responsible for paying for and ensuring their employees are referred for health assessments at least every five years (and for new employees, before they start work). Retiring and former coal mine workers can access the scheme on a voluntary basis.

DNRME oversees the scheme and works with employers, medical practitioners, unions, and coal mine workers to facilitate early diagnosis and treatment for respiratory diseases like coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP).

Other coal workers

Other coal workers (those not employed on a mine site) are not subject to the same mandatory health assessments. They fall under general work health and safety laws, and health assessments are not mandatory. It is up to the employer to determine if the worker is at risk and then determine if a health assessment is required.

Regulating the coal mine industry

Regulating the mining industry requires specialist skills and experience due to the types of risks and hazards, so it falls outside of general work health and safety laws.

Queensland coal mines operate under the *Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999* and mineral mines and quarries operate under the *Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999*.

DNRME's Resources Safety and Health division regulates the coal mines, mineral mines and quarries, explosives, and petroleum and gas industries. It also publicly reports on all confirmed cases of mine dust lung disease that are notified to the department.

A Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health provides advice to the minister about the safety and health of mine and quarry workers and about DNRME's performance.

The commissioner chairs two advisory committees:

- the Coal Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee
- the Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee.

The primary function of the committees is to give advice and make recommendations to the minister about promoting and protecting the safety and health of mine workers.

DNRME's Resources Safety and Health division is responsible for regulating the industry to protect the safety and health of workers and those affected by operations.



In the context of coal mining:

- The Resources Safety and Health division has a Mines Inspectorate unit that monitors and investigates coal mine dust. Inspectors have specialist qualifications in occupational hygiene to assess whether coal workers are being exposed to unsafe levels of coal mine dust.
- The commissioner considers complaints from industry and coal workers when they suspect breaches of the legal framework, such as unsafe work practices. The commissioner has the power to prosecute coal operators or workers for breaches or issue directions that require specific action. The commissioner is also responsible for reporting to the minister and parliament about the performance of the Resources Health and Safety division, under the *Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999*.

Several funding sources contribute to the regulation of the coal mining industry, for example:

- safety and health fees paid by industry
- funds from commercial fee-for-service work by Simtars (a specialist research, training, and testing unit within DNRME)
- consolidated revenue from government.

Industrial and environmental safety

Work health and safety and workers' compensation

The Office of Industrial Relations delivers work health and safety, electrical safety, and workers' compensation services, and manages Queensland's industrial relations framework and labour hire licensing scheme. This includes enforcement of work health and safety laws, investigations of workplace fatalities and serious injuries, prosecution of breaches of legislation, and oversight of self-insurers and dispute resolution services within the workers' compensation scheme.

The Office of Industrial Relations also educates employees and employers on their legal obligations, under both work health and safety and workers' compensation laws.

Environmental safety

The Department of Environment and Science is responsible for protecting the environment in order to avoid, minimise, or mitigate impacts that may harm it. It does this by using scientific expertise to protect and manage it, for example, by implementing air quality control programs.

The Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning is responsible for the planning framework that local governments use to protect communities from dust emissions.

