

Mine Visits and Safety

By Mike Ballou

Many of us in the shotcrete world have had the occasion to either visit or work in underground mines. Mining practices differ from site to site in some ways because the conditions are different in every mine; however, there are a few rules of thumb that everyone ought to be aware of before they go underground in a mine. The following is a list of some of these rules.

1. Behavior. Visitors are guests, so they should act like guests. Don't go walking around unescorted. It makes the miners uneasy. Stay with your escort. Unlike civil tunneling, mining continues at the same location for many years until the ore plays out or until the mining is not profitable anymore. Underground miners consider the mine they work at to be their domain—their home away from home.
2. Photographs. Always ask permission before you take a camera on a mine site to see if it is allowed and ask if you may take photos. Some mines let you take all the photos you want and others won't even allow cameras on the property.
3. Safety glasses and equipment. Mines and miners are very strict about safety and for good reasons, some of which you might not expect. First of all, mining is a dangerous business and miners look out for one another. Safety is not to be compromised for any reason. If they say that safety glasses, hard hats, and hard-toe boots are required, they mean it. Don't think you can remove your safety glasses so you can be more comfortable. They will tell you when you can remove them. The same goes with dust masks and/or respirators. If you are asked to wear them, keep them on. Proper footwear is not an option—it's required. Find out what the mine requires and don't try to bend the rules.
4. Proper clothing. Most mines require reflective vests and some require reflective tape on hard hats and trousers. Don't just expect a mine to furnish these items for you. If you don't have them, check beforehand to see if you can borrow some from the mine. Most mines are gracious and will provide these items for visitors, but it is always good to ask beforehand.
5. Manners and language. Miners can be a rough bunch, and language can be a bit R-rated. If you aren't able to or don't want to be exposed to harsh language, it might not be wise to venture into an underground mine. Harsh language—to some—is mine language. They are used to it, so try not to take offense to it.
6. Smoking. Some mines don't allow smoking anywhere underground. Ask first before lighting up.
7. Hard hats and hearing protection. Miners are seldom seen in any photos with their hard hats off, and that's because



Typical mining safety equipment

they never take their hard hats off unless they are in a place that allows them to be taken off. Once you see the “hard hats and safety glasses required” sign, it means you need to comply. A lot of mines require hard hats with over-the-ear hearing protection attached to the hard hat. Others simply require that you have some sort of hearing protection. Either way, find out what is required for the mine before you go underground.

Why list these rules of thumb? And why take them seriously? It's simple. First, it's the right and proper thing to do. If you disobey or compromise the rules, you will usually be found out and escorted off the property, and you may even be told not to return. I've seen it happen.

So obey the rules! Be safe and not only will you prevent accidents, but you'll also prevent unnecessary and possibly embarrassing moments for both yourself and whoever invited you onto the mine site.



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