
Site-Specific Mine Site Safety in North America

Comply, or it may be one and done

By Mike Ballou

Show me a person who tells you that safety on a mine site is just plain common sense, and I'll show you someone who doesn't understand mine safety completely.

Mine safety is not simply common sense. It is that, and a whole lot more. Most mines have their own set of mine-specific regulations and rules. Nearly all mines, in Canada, the USA, and Mexico, are required by law, to follow government-mandated requirements such as U.S. Department of Labor- Mining Health & Safety Administration (MSHA) and/or the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA). Canada and Mexico have their government agencies governing mining as well. Even with strict government regulations, most mines have safety regulations specific to each individual mine. Anyone who desires to visit a mine site needs to accept one thing- whatever the rules and regulations are for a particular mine- these regulations are serious business and are meant to be enforced.

PLAN AHEAD

If you are planning a visit to a mine site try, if possible, to bring your own safety equipment, even if you are there as a visitor or observer. Try to take as many items on this list as is practical.

The typical personal safety list includes:

1. Boots with hard toes (Some mines require metatarsal boots. Find out if they are required)
2. Safety glasses with wrap-around or side shields
3. Hardhat with reflective tape (If you are planning to go underground where head lamps are used, a hardhat with a bracket to attach a head lamp may be required)
4. Hearing protection- either attached to your hardhat or single use foam plugs
5. Reflective vest
6. Coveralls with reflective strips (Some mines do not require reflective strips, but they are a good safety option.)
7. Miner's body belt (If going underground only)
8. Dust mask(s)
9. Respirator (Most mines supply special use respirators)
10. Gloves

It is usually not a good idea to expect the mine to gather up safety gear that will fit you. They may not have it available in your size. Bring yours, and if it is not possible to bring your own, check ahead with the mine, or your escort, and advise them that you will be needing safety gear. Also, it is also advisable, if you plan to shower after going underground, to take your own towel

and toiletries, a change of underwear and a lock for a locker that is usually furnished. Although not always required, showering after an underground mine visit is a good safe practice so you can wash away the dust from the mine. Most mines are set up to accommodate guests who wish to shower.

STAY CLOSE TO YOUR ESCORT AND RESPECT THEM BY FOLLOWING SAFETY REGULATIONS

There are times that visitors are allowed on mine sites, either surface or underground mines, with the sole purpose of observing. That said, all visitors entering a mine site are required to comply with mine safety regulations. This is especially true when visiting an underground mine. Stay as close to your escort as possible and practical. Refrain from venturing off to take photos (photo taking may not be allowed), or checking out equipment or products related to shotcrete or mining, unless permission is granted. Try to stay with the group at all times. If you wish to take photos, examine equipment or materials on site, permission needs to be granted first. Don't make assumptions.

If a mine site visitor does not comply with mine site safety regulations or violates them, that person may be escorted off the property and may not be allowed to re-enter the property or go underground. They may also be denied access to other properties that the mine company owns. Please don't think this doesn't happen. I've seen it happen three different times. All three of the individuals made the mistake of not staying with the group at all times and one took unauthorized photos.

SITE-SPECIFIC SAFETY COURSE

Many mines require anyone who wishes to visit a mine site to attend a site-specific course. This may be a short video at the mine, followed with an exam. Requirements depend on the mine. If an individual needs to stay at a mine site for an extended stay or work there, the person normally must take a full government and mine-approved safety course. These more extensive courses may take from one to five days or longer, depending on the requirements of the mine and the purpose of the visit, and if the person is there to work on the mine site.

Accidents in any form on a mine site impact the entire mine. When any accident happens on a mine site it must be reported, whether it is a "lost time injury" - meaning the injured person can go back to work the same day as the accident, or a "lost time

accident” - which means the injured person takes one or more days off work due to the injury.

Active mines must be profitable to operate. Mining is a risky business, so anything that slows production, such as dealing with an accident, is a serious concern. Anything that increases the cost of mining is a serious issue. Mines pay premiums to insurance companies based on their accident record. When there is an accident, even a minor one, insurance premiums may increase and that means decreased profitability.

Our professions as contractors, miners, suppliers in the shotcrete industry often requires us to visit and work on many different mine sites. We need to ensure that we understand and give proper training to our personnel so that mining accidents are avoided. The rules are simple and make sense. Helping to keep an accident-free mine site is in everyone’s best interest.



Mike Ballou has been in the mining and tunneling business for nearly 30 years and has enjoyed being a part of ASA and ACI for most of those years. He has served on several committees and subcommittees in both ASA and ACI. He is a civil engineer graduate; owner and President of Bullhide Fibers, Inc. based in Hurricane, Utah; and a co-owner of Crossroads Construction Co. Inc., which is an industrial construction company with a focus on mining projects, based in Magna, Utah.



Safety gear required for mine site visits.