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Compliance investigation continues into Hunter coal mine fume incident

BHP Billiton’s Mt Arthur Coal mine has agreed to review and modify its management strategies following a blast fume incident in February which is being investigated by Planning & Infrastructure (P&I) compliance officers.

The 19 February incident occurred when one of six fired shots resulted in a significant fume that affected the Thomas Mitchell industrial estate near Muswellbrook.

P&I compliance staff in Singleton are continuing to investigate the incident in consultation with the Environment Protection Authority and will decide what enforcement action is necessary when their investigation is complete.

As detailed in P&I’s February compliance report, compliance officers have met with staff from Mt Arthur Coal to discuss how mine operators will ensure that a similar event does not occur in the future.

A spokesperson for P&I said BHP has engaged an independent consultant to review the mine’s Blast Fume Management Strategy to assess what other practical measures can be undertaken to minimise blast fumes.

Mine operators had committed to using a different type of explosive to help minimise the chance of a blast fume being created in the northern area of the mine, where the potential impact on the community is greatest.

“The mine’s management will also review how staff members measure and assess weather conditions prior to a blast and how to improve community notification processes during events like this,” the spokesperson said.

Separately, P&I’s Sydney compliance team requested in February that the proponent of the Gullen Range Wind Farm stop work on a number of turbines after an investigation found they were being built in unauthorised locations.

In response, Gullen Range Wind Farm ceased construction work on 16 turbines being built closer to residential properties.


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