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More ‘planning police’ keeping mines in line

Mines and other major developments will be under greater scrutiny, with the Department of Planning and Environment putting more compliance officers to work in the Hunter.

The Department’s ‘planning police’ work to ensure coal mines and other state significant developments and infrastructure are following the strict conditions imposed when they are approved.

On-the-spot fines for high impact developments that breach their approval conditions, including coal mines, will be increased five-fold to $15,000.

“Noise, dust, subsidence, environmental effects and other impacts are very real concerns – that’s why the Department puts strict conditions on mining operations and other state significant developments,” a Department spokesperson said.

“These conditions are crucial to helping us strike the right balance between the significant benefits major projects can bring in terms of job creation and investment, and any effects they might have on their neighbours.

“The vast majority of mines, quarries, factories and other major developments follow the rules, but more compliance officers mean more checks and a better chance of any breaches being followed up.”

There are now six compliance officers based in the Department’s Singleton office, working across the Hunter with an expanded focus.

“Coal mines will continue to be one of our top priorities, but the increase means all types of major developments will now be regularly visited by the ‘planning police’, ” the spokesperson said.

“Surveillance and unannounced inspections are two of the many investigation tools at their disposal, so in many cases mines won’t even know they’re being checked.”

The spokesperson said compliance officers work closely with the community, industry, local councils and other government agencies to investigate potential breaches of conditions and carry out enforcement where necessary.

“Information from community members is an important way we learn about issues to investigate,” the spokesperson said.
“Enforcement can range from negotiating fixes, issuing penalty notices and in serious cases, criminal prosecutions.”

The Department has carried out more than 750 compliance checks and more than 200 enforcements so far this financial year.

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