Mines Safety Significant Incident Report No. 176

Light vehicle collides with stationary loader

Summary of incident

A worker was returning to a mine site in the mid-afternoon, after completing work off site. He was driving a light vehicle along a straight well-formed gravel road, having just made a 90° left turn. His next recollection was waking up while crashing into a stationary loader. The loader had broken down several weeks earlier and could not be moved off the road. Its location was delineated with orange traffic cones.

Probable causes

Direct

- From the incident description, it is possible that the worker experienced a micro-sleep.

Note: A micro-sleep, described by ICAO (2011:A-3), is: “A short period of time (seconds) when the brain disengages from the environment (it stops processing visual information and sounds) and slips uncontrollably into light non-REM sleep. Micro-sleeps are a sign of extreme physiological sleepiness.”

Action required

There are many causal factors that may increase the likelihood of experiencing micro-sleep episodes. Employers and employees need to be aware of such causal factors.

Further information

The International Civil Aviation Organisation has a website dedicated to fatigue management at www2.icao.int/en/FatigueManagement with documents and toolkits that may be useful.

Visit the publications section of the Resources Safety website at www.dmp.wa.gov.au/ResourcesSafety for a code of practice and guideline on working hours that may provide useful guidance.

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