



TYC Martin Knee receiving his commemorative SME plaque from DMP Director General Richard Sellers

BATON CHANGE FOR STATE MINING ENGINEER

After more than 20 years with the Resources Safety Division of the Department of Mines and Petroleum and its predecessors, the State Mining Engineer Martin Knee retired on 2 October 2009 and started the next stage of his life.

After travelling the world and working on mine sites in Zambia, Ireland, the Middle East and around Australia, Martin said it was time to pass the baton to a new team member.

“I have seen a lot of changes and a lot of people come and go in the department, but now it is my turn to go,” he said. “One of the things that influenced me in going now is that I am determined to have some fun with the rest of my life.

“I watched my father manage six months of retirement before he died of his first and only heart attack and thought this is not going to happen to me, so time to take your leave while you are still young enough to enjoy the rest of your life.”

The third-generation engineer started his career in Zambia after completing a degree in England as a mining engineer. After looking at various types of engineering, Martin said

mining engineering had offered the best opportunity for travel and broadening horizons.

“My father thought I was seriously deranged wanting to go into the mining business and he could not understand why anybody would want to go into dark holes in the ground, but I never regretted it,” Martin said.

“My first job in Zambia as a very green, young engineer was on the Mufolira mine. We had an accident there that killed 89 people and that made a powerful impression on me that has stayed with me my entire career.

“There was a major cave-in and inundation by one of the large tails dams at the mine, and the damage caused was devastating. It was, however, a good education in terms of what can go wrong. It was a very large and well run operation, and had been more or less like shelling peas until this problem occurred.

“I spent the first couple of years of my career working on the recovery operations from the accident, which included working as a shift boss and mining directly underneath the site of the major cave-in that had caused all the problems. This clarifies the mind wonderfully.”

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After getting married and working seven years with the company to progress from a very junior engineer to an underground manager with 700 staff, Martin decided to take up a job opportunity in Ireland.

“My wife didn't like Zambia as the Rhodesian War was going on and it was very rugged and violent in a lot of cases, so we left and went to live for a couple of years in west Ireland,” Martin said.

“It was quite an eye opener after Africa, and I realised why Ireland was forty shades of green as it used to rain about 300 days a year.

“I took up a position as the mine engineer with Tynagh mine and one of the things I was involved in was handling the closure schedule for the mine, so I knew exactly how long it was going to last and was able to get out in good time.

“Then, in 1979, I landed a job in the Middle East as the mine manager on the Sohar Copper Project in the Sultanate of Oman. You couldn't get a more different environment from the lush green in Ireland we had been living in, to the rocky desert in the Persian Gulf.”

After a couple of years in the Middle East, and with their second child on the way, Martin and his wife moved back to England.

“Oman was a touch primitive in those days and it wasn't a great place to have a new baby, especially with the climate, which was pretty brutal in summer,” he said.

“We went back to England for a few months and I thought I had better get a job. After some calling around, I was offered two opportunities, one in South Africa and the other in Australia. I didn't really want to go back to Africa as I had been there and done that, so I decided to head to Australia.

“After flying to Sydney for an interview, I landed a job as general manager of the Gunpowder copper mine in Queensland, which I found interesting as it was an underground in-situ leaching operation and very different to what I had been used to.

“It was a short-term job as the mine closed down, so we left Queensland and headed to Leinster in Western Australia, where I started as the chief engineer, and later became the mine operations manager.

“After a few years in the job, I decided to try working in an open-cut mine and went to Argyle diamond mine. My job with Argyle was a bit of a revelation, and my first view of the surface mining job was ‘why has a man been beating his brains out down dark holes in the ground all of this time when he could have been doing this?’

“Some of the biggest differences were that you could see everything that was going on, and if you wanted to speak to anyone you could just pick up the microphone and talk to them on the radio. You couldn't do that on underground mines in those days, although all of that has changed quite significantly

now with underground communications being improved.

“Although I loved the job, it was fly-in fly-out and hard on the family, so I looked around for another job where we could all be together. That's how I came to join the then Department of Mines in 1986.”

Martin's first position in the public sector was as the senior inspector of mines in Karratha. After seven years in the role, Martin took up an opportunity to move back to Perth as the senior inspector of mines for the Perth region, which in those days covered the area from south of Carnarvon to Albany.

Following Martin's promotion to the role as general manager of the mines inspectorate, he was appointed the State Mining Engineer in 2001.

“When my predecessor as the State Mining Engineer, Jim Torlach, retired, I took over that role as well, which I found to be much more involved in the policy side of things,” Martin said.

“I saw some very interesting things during my time in the role. I have enjoyed it, although it has been hard from time to time, and you never get used to dealing with the families of people who have been injured or killed on a mine site. You never forget that there are actual people behind the statistics, that's the big lesson you have to learn as it is people's lives you are dealing with.”

Martin said the one thing he will take away with him is the people he has met in both the industry and public sector.

“I have worked with some really good people and I have learnt a lot from them both professionally and personally,” he said. “There are very high quality people working in the inspectorate, and they are technically very competent.

“I guess one of the things that has surfaced in the resources industry is the way the inspectorate will operate going forward into the future. Major changes are on the way. It's something that I have been involved with and it has made me conscious that it's time to pass the baton on to someone a bit younger, more enthusiastic and more open to change.

“In any management role, you have to know your use-by date and, after 23 years in the department, mine is up.”

Martin said he has no real plans until after Christmas, but attending to his wife's list was his first priority.

“My wife has a long list of jobs she wants done around the house, and on my first weekend in retirement I will no longer have any excuse not to do them,” he said.

“Travel is not a high priority as we have done quite a bit of travelling already. However, if we want to go to Rio for the Carnival, we can now just get up and do it.”



TAKING OSH ON THE ROAD

Resources Safety staff recently engaged with industry members on mines safety concerns surrounding radiation, vehicle access, the importance of rest and sleep, and hazardous manual tasks. These topics were up for discussion at the fifth annual Mines Safety Roadshow held in October 2009.

Executive Director of Resources Safety, Malcolm Russell, said that the annual roadshows were a valuable tool in keeping regional areas throughout Western Australia up-to-date on key safety and health issues of concern to the mines inspectorate.

“Through these roadshows, we can ensure that industry has access to highly qualified staff and the latest information,” he said. “The State Government is committed to ensuring that the State’s mining industry operates under the best safety framework possible, and implementing initiatives such as the Mines Safety Roadshows is valuable in helping industry to adopt a risk management approach.”

The roadshow kicked off in Kalgoorlie, before travelling south to Bunbury and north to Tom Price. Perth was the last stop in

the itinerary. There were about 300 participants in total. The number would have been higher but some 20 registrants did not make it into Tom Price as the town was encircled by fires and access roads were closed. However, a later videoconference meant some did not miss out completely.

Each roadshow started with an overview of industry’s recent safety performance, followed by information sessions. The events also provided opportunities for networking with other registrants as well as mines inspectors, senior scientific officers and Resources Safety staff involved in education and training.

The Perth event also addressed the issue of safe design of equipment, with a presentation by Stuart Evans of Sandvik Mining and Construction, who spoke on behalf of the Earth Moving Equipment Round Table (EMESRT).

EMESRT was formally established in 2006 by six global mining companies to start a process of engagement between original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and mining customers. The aim is to encourage OEMs to incorporate human factors issues early in the equipment design life cycle to help designers reduce health and safety risks to an acceptable level, particularly those associated with operability and maintainability.



TYC Bunbury

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MALCOLM RUSSELL

Stuart's in-depth machinery expertise and knowledge of the mining industry at local, national and international levels, combined with his occupational health and safety experience and OEM perspective, led to an informative and balanced overview of EMESRT's role and plans for the future.

Resources Safety's Director of Mines Safety and newly appointed State Mining Engineer, Simon Ridge, said that the roadshows were also important in supporting the development of resilient safety cultures in mining workplaces, with communication and consultation being integral to this process. The manual task presentation clearly demonstrated this philosophy, with the application of "participative ergonomics" being fundamental to successfully managing this hazard, which accounts for about half of all injuries.

One of the major issues discussed at all venues was fatigue management. There appears to be an increasing willingness in industry to tackle this issue in a coordinated and consultative manner. This will be a key action item for Resources Safety's education and information program in 2010, and it is hoped to use an approach similar to that adopted for hazardous manual tasks.



SH Fires cut off Tom Price during the roadshow



SH Delegation leader Yang Shaohua (left) with State Mining Engineer Simon Ridge

REGULATORS BRIEF CHINESE VISITORS ON SAFETY IN WA

A delegation from China's Zhejiang Administration of Work Safety recently visited Resources Safety to learn about the division's many roles and activities.

The 20-strong delegation was in Perth as part of a five-day State visit organised by the Department of Commerce's WorkSafe Division. The visitors attended seminars, presentations and site visits to learn how their Western Australian counterparts regulate the various aspects of occupational safety and health.

The delegation heard from the following Resources Safety presenters.

- State Mining Engineer, Simon Ridge, gave the visitors a brief overview of the history of Western Australia's mines safety and health legislation, the current situation for the mining inspectorate, and future directions.
- Principal Dangerous Goods Officer, Lawry Lim, explained the role of the Dangerous Goods Safety Branch and legislative requirements that Western Australian companies working with dangerous goods are expected to adhere to. He also briefly covered onshore petroleum safety.
- Communications Manager, Su Ho, described Resources

Safety's important role in safety education and publications. The group showed particular interest in the roadshows, the role of safety and health representatives, and the participation of staff in industry events such as the mine emergency response competitions.

Resources Safety also arranged visits to MineARC Systems (refuge chamber manufacturer), Alcoa Kwinana and Wesfarmers Premier coal mine in Collie.

Through an interpreter, the Zhejiang Administration of Work Safety's Director, Mr Yang Shaohua, said that the presentations were very informative.

"I have learnt many things so far, and I found the points on education for general workers and promotion of safety conduct in the workplace very interesting," he said.

"I feel that we share many concerns with our colleagues here, and have many fundamental common goals such as reducing incidence and fatality rates in all aspects of the industry."

Mr Yang said he was most interested in hearing about how Western Australia's safety legislation differs in each industry and how industry responded. The group was particularly curious about the move from prescriptive to risk-based legislation.