

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question Without Notice

Wednesday, 27 November 2019

C1559. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Regional Development representing the Minister for Mines and Petroleum

I refer to the release of black shale gas at Rio Tinto's iron ore mining facility in Tom Price last month and ask:

1. Is there an area of the facility that is releasing black shale gas with any regularity?
2. What is the chemical makeup of black shale gas?
3. What is the risk assessment of further exposure of workers to black shale gas?
4. What risk management is occurring to prevent further exposure of workers to black shale gas?
5. Has the Department visited the facility to investigate the cause of the emissions?
6. If no to (5), why not?

Answer

I thank the member for the question. The following information has been provided to me by the Minister for Mines and Petroleum

1. Yes - the mining area where the exposure to black shale gas occurs is known as Pit STR3.
2. The gases emitted from black shale areas arises from spontaneous combustion of carbonaceous materials that includes:
 - Sulphur Dioxide
 - Hydrogen Sulphide
 - Carbon Monoxide
 - Methane
 - Carbon Dioxide
3. The company, has a current Standard Work Procedure that was developed in consultation with employees for working in reactive black shale areas of the operation.
4. The company has advised the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety that the following controls have been implemented to protect employees working in Pit STR 3:
 - Standard Work Procedure for working in reactive Black Shale areas.
 - Employee updates informing all crews on return to work, the status of Mining Operations in Pit STR 3 and the changes to work practices.
 - Use of personal and fixed position gas monitors to monitor the work environment and provide early detection of gases.
 - Additional assessment of the gases in the pit area to improve the understanding of the long term management of atmospheric gases.
 - Additional access controls to the area.

5. The Department has not visited the site to investigate the cause of the emissions, however it has issued an Improvement Notice in relation to "Monitoring of toxic atmospheric gas and response" and a Prohibition Notice in relation to "Personnel being exposed to toxic gas in the Pit STR 3". The Department is continuing to work with the site to investigate the matter.
6. An inspection of the affected facility was scheduled for 21 November 2019 however the Inspectors assigned to conduct the inspection were diverted to investigate another incident. The inspection to the mine will be rescheduled.



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