

CLOSING IN ON REMOTE TRANSPORT RISKS



By Dr Rob McCartney

With over 3000 drilling rigs active in Australia, and the current rapid growth in the industry, there is an ever-increasing number of drilling contractors, suppliers and consultants who operate in the Mineral Exploration, Mining, Water well, Geotechnical and Environmental sectors.

These workers are required to travel to and work in more and more distant and remote locations. This often necessitates operating vehicles for long periods of time on rural and remote roads (of variable quality) which creates one of the highest risk activities for a worker.

In this edition, (focusing on remote transportation and support vehicles) I thought it would be opportune to look at this significant OHS risk.

Evidence shows that more than half of all Australia's road fatalities occur on rural or remote roads and the crash injury rate per capita is up to three times higher in rural areas than urban areas.

Vehicle accidents are the cause of 40% of all at-work deaths in Australia (the next most common cause is being hit by moving objects, 14%, and falls from height, 13%). In the mining and drilling industry, non-road crashes account for 86% of such fatalities.

Various risk factors of importance include:

- Alcohol
- Fatigue
- Poor road quality
- Social acceptability of risk
- Speed
- Monotony
- Over-confidence
- Unlicensed driving

At risk populations include:

- Rural residents
- Shift workers
- Indigenous populations
- Young males

At risk modes of transport include:

- Articulated trucks
- Four wheel drives
- Other heavy vehicles
- Utes

As you can see, this risk profile has many implications for the drilling industry. Therefore, it is vital that employers and employees have strategies to minimise this risk. This can include:

- Ensuring individuals are fit to drive motor vehicles (on and off roads) by:
- Pre-employment and periodic medical assessments
- Vehicle pre-start-up personal checklist
- Ensure they are trained to understand their risk factors and driving behaviour risk factors including not focusing on driving tasks in general, not having a clear picture of surroundings (not being able to properly evaluate road conditions) and not checking behind the vehicle before backing up

Apply and strictly enforce appropriate road safety standards such as:

- Drive only when rested and alert
- Never drive after drinking, taking illicit drugs or when affected by medication
- Do not exceed appropriate work and driving hours
- Always wear a seatbelt
- No mobile phone use while vehicle is in motion
- Journey plans for high risk routes
- Vehicle monitoring systems
- Vehicle maintenance standards

Have an emergency response plan in case of an accident

- The basis for preparation for medical emergency is a risk assessment that considers what might happen and how the location will respond
- A tiered response is typical involving first aiders, medics, tele-medicine support and as a last option aero-medical evacuation
- Appointment of an experienced Occupational Physician to oversee the program

Have a safe and happy holiday season and please drive carefully.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at: Robert.mccartney@primehealth.com.au