Mine Rescue skills put to the test

Newcastle (Australia), 26 June 2014 –

Mines Rescue, a business unit of Coal Services, works hard at protecting the NSW coal industry and delivering on their vision to partner with industry for a safer workplace and a healthy workforce, and today was no exception.

With the invaluable assistance of Centennial Coal, seventy Mines Rescue Brigadesmen from across the Newcastle region descended upon Cooranbong Colliery to compete in the annual Mines Rescue competition. Competing mines included Centennial’s Mandalong, Myuna, Newstan; Yancoal’s Austar and Abel mines, and Glencore’s West Wallsend Colliery.

Since 2000 Newcastle have run their competition as composite teams. Brigadesmen receive a simulated call to duty early in the morning and are given instructions to attend a particular mine site. On arrival at the mine gates, teams are formed. These teams include seasoned Brigadesmen with active duty under their belt, and new trainees, competing for the first time. Each team selects a captain, discusses team strengths and starts shaping roles and responsibilities for the day’s competition.

‘The Newcastle competition format is unique and as close to a real life scenario as these Brigadesmen will experience. It not only tests their core skills, but also their ability to act and communicate effectively as a team,’ explained Peter Cornford, Regional Manager Newcastle Mines Rescue.

The Newcastle Mines Rescue specialist team worked hard to deliver a competition format to challenge the knowledge and skills of the Brigadesmen. The day’s format included several underground and surface simulation exercises to demonstrate knowledge and the use of equipment in high pressure situations. Scenarios included exercises to test hazard awareness, underground search and rescue, first aid, firefighting and a theory component.

Teams were assessed on their ability to utilise their emergency preparedness training, apply first aid and operate mines rescue and gas monitoring equipment; use of self-contained oxygen regenerative breathing apparatus (SCROBA) and compressed air breathing apparatus (CABA).

Mr Cornford thanked Centennial Coal for hosting the competition onsite and also acknowledged the commitment of other mines in the region in allowing the teams and others to attend.

‘Coordinating events such as these take considerable time and planning but they are an essential part of what we (Mines Rescue) are here to do,’ Mr Cornford said.
Paul Healey, General Manager Mines Rescue and Regulation & Compliance reinforced this comment; ‘The health and wellbeing of NSW coal workers is paramount. Mines Rescue has been around since 1926 and the day to day activities of the business today is very different from what it was then. This reflects the importance our industry places on safety. Mines Rescue today is very much about prevention. Thankfully, the requirement for Mines Rescue to go ‘active’ has significantly reduced since Mines Rescue’s inception in NSW.

Today Mines Rescue provides training to the industry and equips Brigadesmen, such as those competing today to be safety leaders in their own workplace through the skills and experience they develop in their emergency response training,’ Mr Healey explained.

‘In saying this, our primary focus is still to provide emergency response to the industry in the case of an emergency. Mines Rescue has been called to active duty twice this year. Competitions like these allow the Brigadesmen to test and hone their skills in preparation for the unfortunate circumstance where they may be called upon. Mr Healey concluded.’

John Turner, Mine Manager of Centennial Coal’s Mandalong Mine and Captain of the winning team on the day, says ‘It’s important for our industry to support Mines Rescue by hosting these events. They play a significant role in our industry. As a competing Brigadesmen for over 24 years and a Mine Manager, competitions like today are invaluable to our industry. Centennial Coal is proud to be part of the Mines Rescue community, both hosting the event today at our mine and having our Brigadesmen compete,’ Mr Turner stated.

‘Coal Services works hard to deliver on our purpose, ‘to protect’, be it through the contribution made by preventative services such as Mines Rescue’s safety training; health surveillance services conducted by CS Health; the dust, gas, and other hazard monitoring services provided by Coal Mines Technical Services (CMTS); or the management and return to work strategies employed by Coal Mines Insurance if an employee in the coal mining industry is injured’. Coal Services’ MD/CEO Lucy Flemming concluded.

Competitions are run across NSW to a standard format where teams are assessed against Mines Rescue competencies. Competitions will also take place in Singleton in July, and Lithgow and Wollongong in August.

The winners from each of the four district competitions will be invited to compete in the Australian competition which will be held in Queensland during October 2014.

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Fast facts:
The following mine sites participated in the 2014 Newcastle Mines Rescue Competition:

- Centennial Coal: Mandalong, Myuna, Newstan
- Yancoal: Austar, Abel
- Glencore: West Wallsend Colliery, Bulga Underground
- LDO: Chain Valley Colliery
• Mines Rescue was established in 1926 under the Mines Rescue Act to provide emergency response services and equipment in the event of an underground emergency in a NSW coal mine.

• Mines Rescue is responsible for training Brigadesmen in rescue techniques and for providing expert advice and supervision in the event of an incident. Mines Rescue also ensures emergency response procedures and guidelines are in place, tested and ready to be deployed at each mine. It regularly conducts audits and simulated emergencies to test its own emergency response capabilities, as well as those of the mines and other emergency services.

• Mines Rescue is fully resourced and equipped to quickly, safely and efficiently respond to an emergency 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

• Emergency response is provided by volunteer Brigadesmen employed at coal mines throughout the State.

• Each underground coal mine is required to provide 5% of its employees for this purpose.

**About Coal Services:**

Coal Services is an industry owned organisation committed to providing critical service and expertise to the NSW coal mining industry.

Coal Services is dedicated to working in partnership with customers and stakeholders to provide a suite of health, safety, environment and insurance solutions. These critical services support NSW coal mine workers, employers and communities and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to maintaining a safe workplace and a healthy workforce.

Coal Services has statutory functions, as outlined within the NSW Coal Industry Act 2001. These functions include, but are not limited to, the provision of workers compensation; occupational health and rehabilitation services; the collection of statistics and the provision of mines rescue emergency services and training to the NSW coal industry.