

Without Prejudice

Singleton Shire Healthy Environment Group



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A community-based group looking to address Environmental issues affecting Singleton Shire residents

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We seek identification as to what is making our Children and Community Sick so they can be Mitigated by OH&S Compliance Orders.

SSHEG Focus on Health

SSHEG is Not Anti Mining or Anti Power Stations

Director General NSW Planning Dept.
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SUBJECT HUNTER VALLEY OPEN CUT COALMINE BLASTING

It is clear upon review that "Near Neighbours and Farming Families to Open Cut Mines" are "Occupationally Exposed Persons to Mining Operations" and are to have the same protections as Mine Workers.

How fair would this be in restoring the Balance?

We are alarmed at the frequency of Residents reporting "Gassing" by Open Cut Mining Blast Plumes that are drifting at ground level well outside the Mine Leases.

In recent times Residents have reported to SSHEG "Gassings" from Rixs Creek Mine that drifted onto at least two Residential Homes on Maison Dieu Road, followed by "Gassings" of Residents at Muswellbrook Industrial Estate from Mt Owen Mine Blasting.

This follows the reported “Gassing and Hospitalisation” at Bulga Mine as Workers reported what now appears to be “Occupationally Exposed to Drifting Blast Plume” emanating from Mt Thorley Warkworth (MTW) Mine Blasting that drifted and landed at ground level outside the MTW Lease area. (After repeated requests **Attachment 3** was finally provided as the explanation and circumstance). However this report is rather superficial when what is required is a Technical detailed Report which would enable proper scrutiny to occur. Most importantly, In this Bulga Workers “Gassing”, current Best Practice focus on Plume Colour to represent the OH&S Health Risk seems misguided as this Blast is a Grade 1 of 5 Low Risk Type confirming now that all Blast Plumes are a Danger to Humans should they not disperse but return to ground, especially on the unprotected Community outside the Mine Leases (Refer **Attachment 3** Photos taken from Image capturing and Report).

We also note that Plume Image Videos seem to only show the Plume appearing over the Mine edge, but the Technical understanding of the effectiveness of the Blast design needs to capture the Blast Hole Matrix surface impact to visualize any Blast Hole Breakouts that Spew high into the Atmosphere, showing the actual behavior and effectiveness of the Blast.

We are also aware that one Bulga Resident has in the past reported “Gassings” in their backyard many Kilometres from MTW Mine Blasting Plumes NNW of Bulga Bridge and West of the Hunter River. This type of “Blast Plume Gassing of Residents” was reported in detail at Camberwell Village in SSHEG Letter dated 4th November 2010 many times over in the years 2004 to 2010. (**Attachment 2**). Many other such incidents are expected to be identified by a review of Government Authority records over many years in the Hunter Valley.

In recent Mine Blasting “Gassings” discussions with the Hunter Mining Dialogue, it has surfaced that “The Explosives Expert” and some mine representatives are not aware that these drifting Mine Blast Plumes are returning to ground well outside the Mine Leases.

SSHEG seeks the support of the Director General of Planning to carry out a comprehensive Review and Technical Reports which focuses on the recent “Mine Blast Gassings Incidents” outlined above with a view that a Technical Panel of Mining, Explosives Experts, Orica Technical Specialists and Government Authorities can ascertain improvements to Blasting Protocols that “Ostensively can Eliminate Blast Plumes being released into the Atmosphere”.

SSHEG contend that these Mine Blast Plumes also directly contribute to the Hunter Valley “Brown Smog” build up, leading to the conclusions of the “Elimination of Mine Blasts Dust and Plumes into the Atmosphere”.

We now believe that the attempt to install a so called “Best Practice Open Cut Coal Mine Blasting Management Plan” has on the face of it “Licenced Mining Companies and Blasting Companies to emit large quantities of Hot gases, Toxic substances, unburnt Diesel based Explosives and Dust into the Atmosphere” in what would be called in any other Industry – “Unregulated Pollution Emissions”. The reliance on, and the use of subjective

observations of Blast Plume Colour and Grey scale classification is a regression to the good old days of the “Ringleman Scales for Chimney Pollution. However we respectfully comment, it is clear these New Hunter Valley Blast Management Plans have simply produced documents that allow the continuation of past unacceptable Blast practices.

SSHEG have previously reported that Open Cut Mine Blasting can be fully contained below the surface without Emissions into the Atmosphere; such an example was Blasting at Rixs Creek that was necessary to prevent damage to the New England Highway close by. Further investigations identified the use of Plastic Stemming Plugs by Orica and others are also specifically designed to prevent the release of the Blast to Atmosphere while significantly improving the Efficiency of the actual blast in fracturing the “Rock Strata”.

All things considered, the 2013 World Health Organisation announcements regarding the association between Air Pollution and Community Morbidity and Mortality points the way to the “Elimination of Mine Blasting into the Atmosphere” as the most significant Pollution Mitigation measure that has not been adequately considered.

From the Environmental Pollution and Community Disease Risk point of view the existence of “Blasting Technology” without Emissions into the Atmosphere represents the “Best Practice Blasting” ideally suited for the enclosed Hunter Valley where Open Cut Mining extends across the Valley floor all the way from Singleton to Muswellbrook, - so far.

Since late last year, “The Elimination of Blasting into the Atmosphere” as the SSHEG Priority Mitigation Plan has been presented to the Hunter Mining Dialogue, Mt Thorley Warkworth Community Consultative Committee (CCC), and the Hunter Valley Operations CCC where the issue of “Near Neighbours as Occupationally Exposed Persons to Mining” was also detailed and a debate initiated for its immediate implementation. (**Attachment 1**)

SSHEG is also considering a number of other issues, especially our third Priority of the Disease Risk from “Concentrated Corridors of Diesel Exhausts” that are likely to be present in the Hunter Valley, bearing in mind that the EPA is reporting that around 600 Million Litres of Diesel Fuel was consumed by Mining in 2013 in the Hunter Valley.

In summary, while a leap forward occurred in October 2013 in the Air Pollution understanding of Human Diseases based on Yearly Average Pollution Exposures, supported by the seasonal variation of Hunter Valley Air Pollution Characterisation Sources, we are concerned that the Air Pollution Mitigation actions are not keeping pace with this latest International Medical understanding of Air Pollution related Diseases.

Singleton Shire Residents still today perceive the Short Term Disease Threat from Open Cut Mining Air Pollution on a day to day basis is the single most consistent Health Risk related Complaint by Residents.

We feel that for Open Cut Mining to continue Operating beside Residents in the absence of “Community Buffer Zones” in the Hunter Valley that it is essential that a way forward of Pollution Mitigation be added to existing Mitigation measures that not only

reestablishes a better Balance but also is seen by the affected Residents and the Community as establishing that Balance.

The adoption of the two Pollution SSHEG Mitigation measures outlined in **Attachment 1** should go a long way to restoring a better balance between Residents and Open Cut Coal Mining in the Hunter Valley.

We believe a better understanding of the “Gassing of Residents” would be unearthed by a review by the Director General of the last four years of Mine Blasting in the Hunter Valley in terms of the number of Blasts per day, quantity of Explosives per day, Plume Drifting Patterns per day, Number of Blasts contained by what stemming, Number of Blasts with unexpected Breakouts of Plumes, Plume Pollution Classification by Size and Orange Colour rating each day, Number of Complaints and details recorded over the four years, and copies of the “Blast Video recordings and their mine reports etc” for those Blasts that are the subject of Community Reports of “Smell, pungent fumes, choking, etc by Residents, on Industrial Estates and sometimes other Mines.(Refer Draft outline of Blast Data Sets **Attachment 4**)

In view of the ongoing Community concern we seek your support to implement New Improved Blasting that “Eliminates Plume Emissions of Drifting Hot Gas and Dust Bubbles into the Atmosphere”, followed by recognition and safeguarding of “Near Neighbours to Open Cut Mining” as “Occupationally Exposed Persons” as detailed in **Attachment 1**.

It now appears that “almost Colourless Drifting Blast Plumes are returning to Ground some Kilometres away at Residential Homes well outside the Mine Lease. (Refer MTW 20 Sept 2013 “Gassings” Photos **Attachment 3**) This warrants action now.

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For the Singleton Shire Healthy Environment Group