

Mine Safety Agency Issues Alert for Water-Related Fatalities

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Working around, over, or near water is a safety hazard that may result in entrapment and drowning, the Mining Safety and Health Administration has warned in a [hazard alert](#).

The federal agency said 24 miners have died at metal and nonmetal mines and facilities while working on or near water since 2005.

In a [recent letter](#) to metal and nonmetal (M/NM) mine operators, Neal H. Merrifield, administrator for metal and nonmetal mine safety and health at MSHA, wrote, “Whether working on a dredge, driving a haul truck, or operating a bulldozer, miners are at risk of drowning or entrapment when they work near water.”

He added, “The positive steps that operators, contractors and miners take to avoid unsafe acts and conditions combine to protect individuals against drowning and entrapment at M/NM operations.”

The agency said safety risks include: traveling or operating heavy equipment near water, equipment weight and vibration, undercut soil banks at water’s edge, sloughing ground, varied water depths, swift water currents, inadequate berms, narrow roadways, and electrocution.

Merrifield wrote, “Following precautions to control safety in the environment and equipment when working on the surface helps to protect miners because they cannot see what is beneath the water.”

The agency recommended the following “[best practices](#)”:

1. Conduct a daily workplace check, especially for loose material along haul roads and travel areas near water;
2. Know water depth, subsurface conditions, and ground conditions before work begins;
3. Keep equipment a safe distance from the water’s edge;
4. Avoid traveling over ice-covered water;
5. Provide secure and stable handrails at workboats and dredges around docks and workboats near water hazards;

6. Make certain berms are continuous and at least mid-axle high near water hazards;
7. Miners must wear a life vest, “preferably a Type I or Type V personal flotation device (PFD) approved by the Coast Guard,” for the entire time they work on water;
8. Keep water rescue equipment easily accessible;
9. Know where extra PDFs and rescue rings are stored; and
10. Provide good housekeeping and keep all travel ways clear around water hazards; areas where miners travel must be free of tripping hazards, so make sure all work areas are clean and orderly.

The safety alert was released in response to a suggestion by the State of Oklahoma Department of Mines.

“Failure to be attentive to water hazards can have deadly results,” Merrifield said.

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