



## China's Coal Mine Death Toll Sparks Visit from Chinese Safety Delegation

*By Ravi Johnpullé, Business Manager, TestSafe Australia and James Zhao, Electrical Engineer, Electrical Low Current Branch, TestSafe Australia*

A top-level delegation sponsored by China's State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS) recently visited TestSafe Australia as part of a fact-finding tour of Australian coal mining industry sites and testing facilities.



*Ravi Johnpullé welcoming the delegation group to TestSafe Australia*



*David Pearson, Head of Fire & Explosion Unit showing the delegation group a demonstration in the Fire Gallery*

The Chinese government through SAWS is currently cracking down heavily on unsafe coalmines throughout China in order to combat the high level of coalmine based serious accidents and deaths. Official figures supplied by SAWS in 2002 show that in the first 6 months 3393 miners died whilst in the following year this had dropped by 7.4% to 2110. The bulk of these fatalities occurred in underground gas explosions. According to the Deputy Director of SAWS, Mr. Zhao Tiechui,

*"Although the number of deaths dropped, the work safety problem in coal mines remains tough with coal mine accidents accounting for 39.8% of the total accidents across all industries, and 42.4% of the deaths".*  
*"Especially in the large number of small mines, technology and equipment standards and safe production conditions are very backward. The level of skills in this profession is low and management standards are poor".*

China is dependent on coal to provide 70% of the country's energy needs. It has 28,000 mines with some owned by State and local governments, but the vast majority being privately owned in townships and villages. These produce 90% of China's coal output and are often located in mountainous and isolated areas. Safety authorities have experienced great difficulty in getting to these mines with the situation compounded by the fact that the workforce is often local farmers unskilled in underground mining who have been attracted to the work by

relatively higher wages. As the following table shows, the bulk of coal mine accidents is in this sector. (1)\*

Fatality Rate No. of Deaths per Million Tonnes	Major State-Owned	Local State-Owned	Township & Village
	1.33	3.82	12.73
	13.9%	18.1%	42.4%

The focus of SAWS is to implement prevention measures specifically targeted for these small coalmines. At the same time the government is lifting the domestic price of coal in an attempt to drive out small marginal mines from the industry. In 2001 it is estimated that approximately 1,000 mines were closed but at the same time illegal black market mines also opened to capitalise on the higher prices.

The 13 delegates sponsored by SAWS came from a range of government agencies including research institutes, Occupational health and safety authorities and electrical equipment testing organisations. (See side box)

They were particularly attracted to our testing and quality control systems. Although there are several Test Stations in China none are on the scale of TestSafe and none have underground Fire and Explosion galleries for testing equipment in simulated situations. Also none have yet received international accreditation to issue universally recognised certification. Many of the



James Zhao has been with TestSafe since 2002, joining us from China with more than 10 years electrical equipment design experience. His fluent Mandarin proves to be extremely useful for dealing with the increasing number of enquiries from Mainland China, and especially during visits by top-level Chinese delegates

world's leading manufacturer's of equipment for use in hazardous work areas are now established in China and their output is being imported for use in Australian industry.

The Delegation indicated their interest in TestSafe providing a range of services to help them reach their goals such as equipment testing, risk analysis, auditing and implementation of

quality control systems.

In the next few months delegations from the Chinese Coal Mine Institute and the China Electrical Equipment Association will undertake a more detailed visits to TestSafe.

*(1)\* "An overview of the work safety situation in China", published by SAWS Online 5 January 2003.*

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