QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 607

asked on Tuesday, 29 April 2008

MR SEENEY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY (MR WILSON)—

QUESTION:

Will he detail the results of audits at Queensland mines conducted as part of a crackdown on safety standards?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question.

With reference to safety and health audits carried out by the Mines Inspectorate of the Department of Mines and Energy, I remind the House of my announcement to members of Parliament on 8 March last year. In that announcement I said that there would be a series of ten unannounced audits of selected underground mines across Queensland.

The ten audits were not to be a naming and shaming exercise, but were to be about improving mine safety.

Those ten unannounced audits have been completed, and I have held discussions about the results of those audits with senior executives of most of the relevant mine operators. The mine operators and the Queensland Resources Council expressed support for the exercise and improvements have been put in place by industry.

The audits included such areas as strata control, ventilation, contractor management, traffic and vehicle controls, emergency procedures and health hazards.

The audits identified seven common themes requiring attention throughout the industry. These themes related to risk management, incident investigations, understanding of safety management systems, contractor management, emergency management and document control.

I was, and remain, determined that each mine should consider the outcomes of the audits in terms of its own operations. Consequently, I wrote to site senior executives of mines throughout Queensland asking them to consider how the issues identified are, or would be, reflected in the future safety and health management of their operations.

The identified common themes and the responses from the site senior executives are now included in the factors used to identify audit and inspection programs for the Mines Inspectorate.

The ten audits themselves resulted in the Mines Inspectorate issuing an average of 5.2 directives or mandatory corrective actions and 12.1 substandard condition and practice notices or recommended corrective actions to each mine.

All these actions have been addressed by the relevant mines and, apart from a directive to the last mine to be audited requiring longer term studies, they have been completed or are of an ongoing nature.

Safety and health audits and inspections are a continuous function of the Mines Inspectorate. Unannounced audits and inspections are continuing in the 2008/09 work program.

Some of the findings from last year's unannounced audit program hang a lantern on serious safety issues and that is exactly what they were designed to do – to find faults and for the mining companies to fix them.

Queensland has one of the best mine safety records in the world and the best mine safety legislation in Australia.

It is in everyone's interest to keep it that way. The highest safety standards must continue to be enforced – mine by mine, employer by employer, worker by worker.

Nothing is more important than the safety and health of the men and women who work in our mines.