

Press release

Rio Tinto Coal Australia speech at Queensland mining conference

25 August 2009

Rio Tinto Coal Australia managing director Bill Champion has told a Queensland mining industry conference that the link between health and safety is a new horizon issue for the industry.

Mr Champion, who is also a member of the Queensland Resources Council's (QRC) Subcommittee on Safety, has encouraged the industry to give further recognition to the health, fitness and well-being of its employees.

"The health and wellness of our employees plays an important role in each organisation's safety performance," Mr Champion told Queensland Mining Industry Health and Safety Conference 2009 in Townsville.

"This is an area that the QRC has recognised as needing an increased focus. If individual mining companies explore ways of addressing these issues, it will help further improve our industry's performance, reputation and ability to attract and retain a high quality workforce."

Mr Champion's keynote address at the conference today highlighted the safety initiatives put in place by Rio Tinto around the world, including lessons learned along the way from disasters such as the Austrian Lassing Mine collapse in 1998 in which 10 people were killed, and from the BP Texas Oil Refinery fire in March 2005 which killed 15 people and injured more than 100.

"Safety is the most important statistic of all," Mr Champion said.

"I always say that where you find good safety performance in a company, you will also find good financial and production performance, as well as strongly aligned and supportive business cultures.

"People are our most important asset, and at Rio Tinto our number one goal is to keep our employees, contractors and visitors safe and free from injury. As the mining industry continues to improve in the area of safety, we are also understanding how critical it is that we also focus on the health of our employees.

"The outcomes of safety incidents can be greatly influenced by the health and fitness of employees. When there are slips, trips and falls, often the severity of these outcomes will be influenced by the individual's fitness and age. An incident that might result in a contusion for a younger, fitter individual may instead result in a broken bone in an older, less active person."

Mr Champion said the mining industry needs to focus its attention on health-related issues and how these will play a role in improving the industry's safety performance.

"It is about us recognising that we must move forward with controls and monitoring that will ensure our work environments are ones that will encourage good health performance from each organisation," Mr Champion said.

"We need to do everything we can within our controls to encourage behaviour scenarios that will lead to a healthier group of individuals, and also improve the health conditions in and around our mine sites."

Media Enquiries: Alison Smith 07 3361 4223 / 0438 787 038