

Australia: Gold mining company handed meagre fine for worker's amputation

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On May 13, a New South Wales (NSW) District Court imposed a \$750,000 fine on the Newcrest mining company for the preventable amputation of a 23-year-old contract worker's arm at its Cadia East gold and copper mine, near the regional town of Orange, in June 2023.

At the time of the incident, Newcrest was the largest gold producer listed on the Australian stock exchange. In November 2023 it was taken over by Newmont, the world's largest gold mining corporation. Newmont reported a net income of \$7.2 billion in 2025, meaning the fine amounts to roughly one hour of profit.

The meagre fine is another indictment of the official disregard for workers' lives and safety. It was reduced from \$1 million because the company pleaded guilty to "failing to ensure so far as reasonably practicable the health and safety of workers engaged by it."

Judge Paingakulam found that the company knew that formal safety procedures were routinely contravened, but did nothing to stop the practice, despite being well aware of the possible consequences. Despite this scathing judgement, the company escaped with nothing more than a token fine.

On June 19, 2023, Jacob Manns was working as a nipper offsider, assisting the operator of a mobile underground drilling machine, known as a jumbo. The job involved supplying and changing the components that make up the drill assembly. While inserting a steel drill rod into a coupling—a mechanical sleeve that connects sections of the drill together—his left arm became entangled in the rotating part, resulting in the traumatic amputation of his arm below the elbow.

Manns has since undergone multiple surgical procedures, most recently in February 2026. For almost three years, he has required psychological treatment for post-traumatic stress, intrusive memories and

nightmares.

The young worker had been engaged to work at Cadia through a labour-hire company as an underground truck driver, but was filling in as a nipper when the accident occurred. It was only the third shift on which he had done so.

Judge Paingakulam found Manns "had not been provided with or trained in any procedures relating to the mechanical ground support installation work which had been assigned to him."

A Newcrest procedures document contained a warning, in red writing, that workers had previously been fatally injured by rotating drilling equipment. But the worker was never given a copy or assessed on these procedures.

The judge found that, "consistent with common practice at the mine," neither Manns nor the jumbo operator activated the boom immobilisation switch before he moved in front of the machine's stabilising jacks to change the drill steel.

Working in front of the machine's supports "with the system engaged, far from being a 'one off' aberration, was a well-established practice," Judge Paingakulam found, with workers doing so up to 200 times per day.

In 2020, Newcrest had replaced its fleet of M2C "Boomer" drilling machines with M2D Development Rigs. The older machines had an automatic boom immobilisation system that detected motion and shut down the machine whenever a worker moved into the danger zone. The replacement rigs had no such system. The judge found it "inconceivable" that Newcrest would not then implement compensating controls.

"Promptly after the incident," Newcrest introduced procedures, training, camera auditing and additional supervision—"straightforward" measures, the court noted, that had been available and could have been put

in place before Manns lost his arm.

Judge Paingakulam found that, given the scale of Newcrest’s mining operations, its history of safety convictions, and the “multiple significant failures” that produced the 2023 incident, it could not find “that Newcrest is unlikely to reoffend.”

In 2018 the company was fined \$450,000 over the death of contractor Lee William Peters, who was crushed between the machinery he was operating and a rock wall at the Ridgeway mine, also part of the Cadia Valley complex. Investigators found the machine, a shotcrete sprayer that had been modified to serve as a water cannon, was “not fit for purpose.” It required the operator to stand outside the cab while in use, placing them in danger.

In October 2021, worker Brendon Leonard Tamati suffered serious burns escaping a loader fire at Cadia East, caused, the NSW Resources Regulator investigation found, by improper disposal of explosive material, for which the mine had no written procedure. The prosecution was not commenced until January 2025—more than three years after Tamati was injured.

The history at Cadia reflects a broader pattern of serious injuries and deaths across the mining industry and more broadly.

There were 146,700 serious workers compensation claims in Australia in 2024. Mining accounted for 2.3 percent of total claims, 3,300, but had the second-highest median compensation paid per claim at \$36,400, more than double the national median of \$16,300. Median time lost for serious injury claims was the second highest at 11.1 weeks in the mining industry, likely due to the greater severity of the injuries.

Between 2008 and 2024, 23,474 serious injury claims in mining were for traumatic joint/ligament and muscle/tendon injuries, with upper and lower limbs the most common bodily location.

The mining occupations with the most fatalities during this period were machine operators (60), labourers (27) and technicians and trade workers (24). According to Safe Work Australia data from June 4, at least six mining workers have already been killed this year, the same as in all of 2025, when mining had the third highest workplace fatality rate of any industry at 3.4 deaths per 100,000 workers.

Across all industries, at least 56 workers have been

killed on the job this year. On average, there have been 191 workplace deaths in each of the past five years, more than one every two days. These figures understate the true toll: chronic occupational illnesses are routinely excluded from official counts, while other incidents go unreported.

The debilitating injury suffered by Jacob Manns is not simply the result of a failure of regulation or the actions of a particular company. It is the normal operation of an economic system, capitalism, in which the lives of workers are subordinated to profit.

The scourge of workplace injuries and deaths has been presided over for decades by the trade unions and the Labor governments to which they are tied by a thousand threads.

Shortly after Manns was injured, Australian Workers Union (AWU) NSW Branch Secretary Tony Callinan blustered that Newcrest needed to make sure “the safety of their workforce is their most crucial KPI [key performance indicator].” Since then, the AWU has said nothing about the incident, and has allowed operations at the Cadia mine to continue without interruption.

This is typical of the union bureaucracies, which posture as defenders of workers’ health and lives, but insist that workers place their trust in official investigations by the state’s safety regulators. These investigations invariably drag on for years and result in nothing more than a token fine and a slap on the wrist for the company.

What the unions, safety regulators and Labor are covering up is not just the responsibility of individual companies for workplace deaths and injuries, but that of their root cause, the capitalist system itself.

Workers cannot entrust their lives to these organisations. They must take matters into their own hands, by building rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and Labor, to fight for safe working conditions and an end to workplace deaths.



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