Powering Australia’s economy
Revisiting the coal solution

NOMINATIONS OPEN
9th Annual Australian Mining Prospect Awards
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For many workers engaged in the mining industry in Australia the experience of work stress is a very personal and private issue.

Behind tough exteriors, many share the experience of difficulty sleeping, fatigue, feelings of anxiety, loneliness and depression.

This often goes hand in hand with physical symptoms such as an exacerbation of musculoskeletal problems and other existing health complaints.

Making good money has bitter sweet consequences.

For some workers, the dangling carrot encourages them to put up with a working environment they are having trouble adapting to even though they might be better suited psychologically to working in a lower paid job closer to home.

Ultimately both the organisation and the worker may end up paying a price for their stoic endurance as the stress begins to undermine their health, relationships and ability to function across both work and personal domains.

This work stress is also behind the relatively high attrition rate in workers in their first year in the industry.

Surprisingly, research into the implications of work stress in the mining industry on the physical and psychological health and work performance of the workforce is still in its infancy, behind that of research into other high risk industries where there is a clearer understanding of the nature of the relationships between work stress, mental and physical health, and work performance.

Based on Australian mental health statistics however there are irrefutable indicators that the mining industry in general needs to embrace a broader context to the notion of ‘zero harm’.

With more than one million Australians suffering from either depression or anxiety in a given year and with research showing that both depression and anxiety increases the likelihood of workplace accident or injury, it is clear that mining companies need to develop further their understanding of Occupational Health and Safety Issues as it relates to stress and overall fatigue.

There have been many incidents where mining stress or fatigue has been directly related to an injury or even death, both on and off minesites. Long hours and hot seat changeovers have seen cars crushed and people injured, and have lead to threats of strike action at coal mines such as Collie, where workers are up in arms over the potential hazard it poses.

Two fatalities involving drive in drive out workers in Yeppoon and Dysart in 2007 and 2008 were caused by...
Fatigued miners getting behind the wheel, according to Central Queensland coroner Anne Hennessy.

Imagine the overall benefits to the industry if the workforce could switch on and off at will, mechanisms within their own brain and body that could help them to combat stress and fatigue and to adapt to the daily challenges that face them at work?

There is a technique that has been scientifically proven to do just that: a technique called Autogenic Training.

Autogenic Training enables people to self-regulate their psychophysiological responses creating profound changes in the mind and body that lead to optimal physical and psychological health and enhanced performance overall.

It includes a series of mental exercises taught over eight hours and then practised for only a few minutes daily.

Backed by over 3,000 clinical studies worldwide, positive changes brought about by Autogenic Training on the mind and the body are immediate and scientifically measurable.

Helen Gibbons, the chief psychologist and head trainer at the Autogenic Training Institute runs Australia’s only Autogenic Training Programme for organisations and their employees.

“Autogenic Training is a technique unlike any other,” Gibbons said.

“It achieves cognitive and psychological results similar to that achieved through a combination of meditation, yoga, hypnotherapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and on a physical level it produces the same physiological and chemical benefits that are associated with rigorous athletic training.”

She added that for workers it is an internal process, rather than external, so does not require users to discuss their feelings or thoughts with others.

Gibbons explained that the training has already seen positive results within the NSW Police Service; the NSW Fire Brigade; Price Waterhouse Coopers; Ernest and Young; and NASA, which routinely train astronauts and pilots in the Autogenic Training Programme to adapt to the psychological and physical stressors of space travel.

“Every organisation has its own unique combination of environmental factors that can affect the resilience and performance of their employees,” she stated.

“In the mining industry for example, workers aren’t only dealing with complex problems under difficult and often hazardous environmental circumstances, many are also often dealing with psychological disadvantages because of the remote location of their work.

“On top of this, normal personal routines are disrupted to fit in with the work cycles of the mining operations. The fact of the matter is that stress is rarely compartmentalised – for fly in fly out miners stress at work affects home life and stress at home affects work life.

“Little by little, workers find that they are struggling to cope without really being able to identify the core reason. This is not a sign of weakness. It is a very real and a very

Fatigue and work stress present a serious hazard on and off site.

Continued on page 22
They motivate you to go further than you imagined. They fill you with pride, respect and satisfaction. They are badges of honour. And at INPEX, extraordinary achievements happen every day. Recently, we achieved the Final Investment Decision on our US$34 billion Ichthys LNG Project. It’s an exciting time as we prepare to begin the construction of a semi-submersible central processing facility (CPF), a floating, production, storage and offloading (FPSO) vessel, 885km of subsea pipeline and a two train onshore LNG facility on Darwin’s Middle Arm Peninsula. To meet the demands of this enormous undertaking, we have a range of roles available for talented oil and gas specialists to join our team. These are outstanding opportunities to shape an enormous infrastructure project at a critical stage of development. Join a team of leading oil and gas professionals driving innovation on the largest scale imaginable. Experience a close-knit working environment offering the cutting-edge training and support you need to build an exceptional career. It’s time you make your mark extraordinary.