

Commentary

Coal miner's day in India: a reflection on health risks and legislation

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ABSTRACT

Coal mining is a hazardous profession in India that exposes workers to a range of health risks, including respiratory diseases, skin disorders, hearing loss, and injuries. The coal miner's day, observed on May 4th every year, commemorates the hard work and sacrifices of coal miners. The Mines Act, 1952, and its associated regulations mandate the provision of medical facilities, safety and health measures, and rescue stations and trained personnel for the rescue of workers. The Coal Mines (Conservation and Development) Act, 1974, mandates the conservation of coal resources and the development of coal mines while ensuring the safety and health of workers. However, the implementation of these laws has been inadequate in many cases, leading to a high prevalence of occupational diseases among coal miners. The lack of proper implementation of safety and health regulations has been identified as a key factor contributing to the high prevalence of occupational diseases. Additionally, the existing regulations do not address the specific safety and health issues associated with the use of automation and robotics in mining. To safeguard the health and safety of coal miners, more efforts are needed to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and to provide adequate medical support and rehabilitation services. Prioritizing the health and well-being of coal miners can pay tribute to their contribution to society while promoting a safer and healthier workplace for all.

Keywords: Coal mining, Coal miner's day, Occupational health hazard

INTRODUCTION

Coal mining is one of the most hazardous professions in India. The Coal Miner's Day, observed on May 4th every year, commemorates the hard work and sacrifices of coal miners. In this commentary, we will discuss the health risks faced by coal miners and the existing legislation in India aimed at protecting their health.

HEALTH RISKS FACED BY COAL MINERS

Coal mining exposes workers to a range of health hazards, including respiratory diseases, skin disorders, hearing loss, and injuries. Coal dust, which is generated during mining, can cause lung diseases such as black lung disease, silicosis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).¹ These diseases are caused by the

inhalation of coal dust, which leads to the deposition of particulate matter in the lungs.

In addition to respiratory diseases, coal mining also exposes workers to skin disorders caused by exposure to chemicals and high temperatures.² Moreover, coal mining is associated with hearing loss due to the noise generated by heavy machinery and the use of explosives.³ The risk of injuries is also high, given the use of heavy equipment, falls, and accidents involving transportation vehicles.

LEGISLATION IN INDIA FOR PROTECTING COAL MINERS' HEALTH

The Indian Government has enacted several laws and regulations aimed at protecting the health of coal miners. The Mines Act, 1952, is the primary legislation governing

the mining industry in India. The act mandates the provision of medical facilities for workers in mining operations.⁴ In addition, the mines rules, 1955, specifies the measures to be taken to ensure the safety and health of workers in mines.⁵ The mines rescue rules, 1985, provides for the establishment of rescue stations and trained personnel for the rescue of workers in the event of an emergency.⁶

The Coal Mines (Conservation and Development) Act, 1974, mandates the conservation of coal resources and the development of coal mines while ensuring the safety and health of workers.⁷ The coal mines regulations, 2017, is a comprehensive set of regulations that govern the safety and health of workers in coal mines.⁸ The regulations require the identification and assessment of occupational health hazards, the implementation of control measures to prevent exposure to hazards, and the provision of medical surveillance for workers.

In addition, the Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS) is responsible for ensuring compliance with the mines act, 1952, and its associated regulations.⁹ The DGMS conducts inspections of mines to ensure compliance with safety and health regulations and takes enforcement action against non-compliant mines.

DISCUSSION

Despite the existence of legislation aimed at protecting the health of coal miners, the implementation of these laws has been inadequate in many cases. Several studies have reported the high prevalence of occupational diseases among coal miners in India.^{10,11} The lack of proper implementation of safety and health regulations has been identified as a key factor contributing to the high prevalence of occupational diseases.¹²

Moreover, the regulations governing the safety and health of workers in coal mines have not kept pace with technological advancements. For example, the use of automation and robotics in coal mining has the potential to reduce the risk of injuries and exposure to hazards. However, the existing regulations do not address the specific safety and health issues associated with the use of automation and robotics in mining.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Coal Miner's Day is an occasion to acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices made by coal miners in India. However, it is also important to recognize the significant health risks associated with mining work, including respiratory and skin diseases, hearing loss, and mental health issues. The Indian government has enacted several pieces of legislation to safeguard the health and safety of coal miners, such as the mines act and the coal mines regulations, but enforcement of these regulations remains a challenge. More efforts are needed to ensure the effective implementation of these

laws and to provide adequate medical support and rehabilitation services to coal miners. By prioritizing the health and well-being of coal miners, we can pay tribute to their contribution to our society while also promoting a safer and healthier workplace for all.

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