



QUEENSLAND ALUMINA LIMITED

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DATE: 25/05/2009

For immediate release

PROCESS EVENT AT QAL

A discharge of slurry at Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) occurred at approximately 10.20am today due to a failure of the inlet non-return valve to Digester 7.

The Digestion unit was promptly shut down and QAL's First Response Team responded rapidly to the incident. No injuries were reported.

The QAL Crisis Management Team contacted neighbours in areas that may have possibly been affected.

Regulatory authorities have been advised and a full incident investigation is underway.

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For further information, contact: **Melissa Case**
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About Queensland Alumina Limited:

Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) commenced operation in March 1967 with an annual production rate of 600 000 tonnes of alumina. Today QAL is one of the world's largest alumina refineries, producing 3.95 million tonnes of the world's best smelter grade alumina per year. With an average workforce of 1050 employees, QAL is the region's largest employer and annually contributes approximately \$200 million directly to the local economy.

Frequently Asked Questions

Process Event at Queensland Alumina Limited 25.05.2009



QUEENSLAND ALUMINA
LIMITED

What happened?

A discharge of slurry at Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) occurred at approximately 10.20am, Monday 25.05.2009.

How did the emission occur?

A hole developed in the inlet non-return bauxite slurry valve to Digester 7. A full investigation into the cause of this failure is still underway.

How much was emitted?

This can not be confirmed yet and will be calculated as part of our investigation process.

What exactly was released?

The discharge consisted of a fine spray of red mud slurry generated during the Digestion process. It was a wet mixture of crushed bauxite and a caustic soda solution.

How long was this being released until it was shut down?

The digestion unit was shut down immediately and the emission was contained within approximately ½ an hour.

Why did it take so long to control?

The digester units operate under high pressure, so even though the unit was shut down, it still takes some time for the pipes to reduce pressure. The QAL First Response Team sprayed water from the fire appliance to quell the emission.

Was anyone injured? Was there any property damage in the community?

No one was injured as a result of the incident and no property damage has been confirmed at this stage.

Were the Department of Environment and Resources Management (DERM) notified?

Yes, representatives were on site on the afternoon of the incident.

What is an Environmental Protection Order?

QAL was served with an Environmental Protection Order by DERM following the incident which made it necessary to provide the Department with an engineering assessment report to demonstrate that the unit was environmentally safe to operate.

How many times has QAL had to report incidents to the Department of Environment and Resources Management?

In 2008, QAL had no reportable incidents on site. Prior to 2007, QAL had three successive years without reportable incidents. The reportable incidents to DERM (then EPA) in 2007 related to one minor licence exceedence in noise and a minor exceedence in dust emissions from Calciners. QAL has a vision of being incident free and any incident, reportable or not, is undesirable.

Has this happened before?

This is the second reportable incident for 2009. Another incident occurred on 15 January.

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Did the plant shut down?

The affected digestion unit was shut down, however the two remaining digestion units continued to operate as normal. This reduced production levels at the refinery, but it did not cause QAL to shut town totally.

Does a slurry emission mean that our waterways are contaminated?

The emission was a fine spray which would have been carried by the wind, so it is unlikely that waterways would have been impacted.

Where did the emission go?

Initial investigations suggest that environmental factors at the time dispersed the emissions over the QAL buffer zone towards the northern side of Barney Point.

How were employees and contractors told?

QAL has a first response team on site that is trained to control and contain such incidents. Site wide Plant Bulletins and radio contact were used to inform and update employees and contractors.

How do we know when this kind of thing happens? What are your processes to keep people informed?

QAL has a variety of options to keep people informed in the event of an incident including

- Site wide Plant Bulletins and radio contact for employees and contractors
- Visiting a selection of businesses and residents in the potentially affected area
- Contacts through the QAL Community Forum members
- A list of neighbours situated throughout the community and listed on the Community Notification Register
- Media notifications to local TV, newspapers and radio
- Rio Tinto Communications Teams

In the instance of the May incident, all of these methods were employed. QAL also has a plant evacuation siren, if required.

How do you know where the emission went?

QAL has a real time weather monitoring station which tracks environmental conditions from the QAL lookout. At the time of the incident the wind direction was 120 – 130 degrees at a speed of 18km/h. This means that the majority of the emissions were dispersed over the sea. QAL also has 8 permanent alkali monitoring locations in the community. At the time of the event, a further 21 pads were placed at various points within the community.

Did you contact anyone in the community?

QAL has a community notification register which is a list of approximately 100 neighbours that are contacted in the event of an incident that may have affected the community. A total of 21 residents spread throughout the whole of Barney Point were individually contacted to provide a representative sample of those residing in that area. If you would like to be listed on the QAL Community Notifications Register, please contact Community Relations on 1800 181 110.

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What will QAL do to prevent this from happening again?

Part of the investigation involves a root cause analysis. From this a list of actions will be developed to prevent reoccurrence.

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