

May 2024 – February 2025

Examiners' report 2024

Open cut examiner of coal mines other than underground coal mines – Certificate of competence

Written examination

OCE1 – Legislation

Summary of results and general comments

Exam date: 15 May 2024

Number of candidates: 60

Number passed: 34

Highest mark: 80%

Average mark: 54.4%

Lowest mark: 20%

Existing candidates – 60% to pass

New candidates – score 7.5 or above to pass essential question 3a and score 58.5% for the whole paper to pass

Question 1 (total of 25 marks) WHS Reg 2022, Section 19

Highest mark: 25

Average mark: 18

Lowest mark: 4

Examiners' comments:

Most of the candidates could recite the contents of a SMS and were aware of the legislated principal control plans.

Question 2 (total of 25 marks) Schedule 7 of the WHS

Highest mark: 21.5

Average mark: 8.6

Lowest mark: 0

Examiners' comments:

Most of the candidates were not aware of the key matters detailed within Schedule 7. The command structure and notifications aspects were often overlooked, and candidates focused on associated procedures and generic documents instead.

Further to this, candidates performed poorly in the emergency response aspects detailed in Section 91. Very few identified the need for having an adequate number of rescue-trained personnel available, as well as adequate patient transport.

Candidates often mistakenly associated the review period for an emergency plan with the 3-yearly review period, rather than the nominated 12 months in Section 97.

Question 3 (total of 25 marks) WHS Regulation 2017 Part 3.1

Highest mark: 24

Average mark: 16.5

Lowest mark: 3

Examiners' comments:

Most candidates could recite key aspects of the hierarchy of controls, as well as the nominated risks associated with the movement of mobile plants. The various types of interaction within Section 32 were well understood by candidates.

Question 4 (total of 25 marks) Section 33 WHS Regulation 2022

Highest mark: 19.5

Average mark: 11.2

Lowest mark: 3

Examiners' comments:

Candidates performed poorly concerning the contents of the security plan. The vast majority of candidates appeared to recite material within associated guidelines, rather than what the question specifically asked about what was contained within the Explosives Regulation 2013. Of note was the poor performance on how explosives/explosive precursors are transported.

Majority of the candidates could identify the need for a security clearance to be able to handle explosives or explosive precursors. However, an even higher number wrongly associated this with a Blasting Explosives User Licence. It is important to understand that these are different items.

OCE2 – Practical open cut operations

Summary of results and general comments

Exam date: 15 May 2024

Number of candidates: 69

Number passed: 50

Highest mark: 85%

Average mark: 64%

Lowest mark: 39%

Existing candidates – 60% to pass

New candidates – score 8 or above to pass essential question 1a, score 3 or above to pass essential question 4a and score 118 for the whole paper to pass.

Examiners' comments:

As a general comment “over answering” of the questions was common. Some candidates seemed to just list numerous lines of documents and management systems, whether they were related to the question or not. The sheer volume of writing was not needed to attain full marks, simple dot points are all that is needed in many cases. The volume of text makes it hard for the marker to find correct answers hidden in a sea of non-relevant text.

Question 1 (total of 50 marks) Tailings Dam Capping

Highest mark: 44

Average mark: 26

Lowest mark: 12

Examiners' comments:

There was a common failure of candidates to link the supervision of emplacement capping operations with the need to closely review the high-risk activity documents (including the risk assessment). This is a substantial oversight. The failure to review the High-risk activity documents was also critical to Part C and again was poorly handled by many candidates.

Many candidates answered the questions at too high of a level. For example, when asked to “List examples of specific controls for tailings capping” answers such as “strata management plan”, “transport management plan”, and “inspection plan” are not adequate answers as they are document headings in essence. Specific controls typical on a tailings emplacement area could be “tow slings nearby” or “survey monitoring program/radar” or “hard barrier at emplacement entry when not in use” are more useful.

Question 2 (total of 50 marks) Contractors' equipment management

Highest mark: 50

Average mark: 41.2

Lowest mark: 22

Examiners' comments:

Many candidates were able to state most of the requirements for part A of this question. Candidates are reminded that MDG15 is specific to the plant itself, not site procedures/processes/rules. Good knowledge of fire and operator cab/protection controls, however poor knowledge of controls for unplanned movement, safety-critical systems, and human factors from MDG15. Some candidates had a thorough knowledge of prestart inspection systems, others did not answer the question and simply listed aspects previously listed. Relatively low marks across the board for this question.

Question 3 (total of 50 marks) Contractor management

Highest mark: 47

Average mark: 34.3

Lowest mark: 20

Examiners' comments:

- a. Most candidates had a good understanding of legislative requirements and were able to practically describe the application of Section 26 WHSMPR - Contractor to prepare plan or use Safety management system.
- b.
 - i. Consultation with relevant stakeholders question was generally answered very well however some candidates referred to consultation with councils, local authorities, Unions and Resource Regulator and failed to mention the workers themselves.
 - ii. Generally well answered and candidates were able to describe a thorough process to onboard new workers from inductions, Challenge tests, One-on-one discussions, development of skills matrix, etc right through to crew selection.
- c. Generally well-answered and described a structured process to manage the situation outlined in the question. Most candidates answered this question well.

Question 4 (total of 50 marks) Drill & Blast

Highest mark: 42.5

Average mark: 26.9

Lowest mark: 6

Examiners' comments:

Mostly well answered and candidates described a structured process to manage the situation.

- a. A large number of candidates mistakenly identified reactive ground as hot ground and did not provide a clear understanding of how sulphides can potentially react with nitrates.
- b. Most candidates were aware of the need to conduct reactive ground testing, however did not often find the need to consult with key personnel onsite (eg. site Geologist or D&B Engineer). Some candidates did not identify simple visual cues either.
- c. Key design aspects were often identified such as minimising sleep time of the shot, using suitable explosives products, and an effective loading sequence. Very few candidates described controls such as verifying suitable stemming material, minimising spillages on the bench, shot firers using suitable PPE (eg. gas monitors), monitoring weather conditions, and increasing OCE inspections.
- d. Far too many candidates decided to load the 2 holes identified in the question as having a temperature of 110 degrees Celsius. Simply stemming these holes off and continuing to monitor the remaining holes on the pattern would have been a much safer and practical approach. Very few candidates also identified the need to verify the suitable temperature

range from the explosives supplier. Only a handful of candidates decided to consult the MEM in relation to this scenario.

Oral examination

Date: 14-15 August 2024

Number of candidates: 31

Number deemed competent: 15

Examiners' comments:

Certain elements of legislation were well understood such as Inspection Plan requirements and candidates could recite key parts for the function of an OCE. Notification requirements were also well understood in terms of immediacy and preservation requirements.

Oral candidates were prompted on a range of scenarios and for those who were deemed not yet competent, there appeared to be an underlying theme of not being willing to make appropriate notifications or decisions themselves, and instead an over-reliance on simply escalating up to the MEM. The examiners are testing OCEs knowledge, not their ability to delegate up.

On some occasions, candidates were also too eager to jump in and tend to an emergency scenario, without adequately gathering information and assessing the risks/controls relevant to the environment. Only once the candidate got half way through their response, did they realise that a key piece of information was missed up front which would have dictated a potentially different emergency response. Candidates need to ensure they have a well thought out and structured response when answering emergency response style questions, so as to avoid this exact issue.

Post oral examination

Date: 19 February 2025

Number of candidates:14

Number deemed competent: 11

Examiners' comments:

The standard of candidates for the post oral examinations was generally much improved. It was evident in the number of competent candidates that they had put in greater efforts into studying and preparing for the examinations. Successful candidates were able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of legislation and how to apply. Emergency response and management were structured and systematic and most applied good risk management protocols to recovery from an unwanted event including who to involve in risk assessments. Most candidates were aware of notification protocols which included internal and external notifications.

Unsuccessful candidates struggled with legislation-based questions and didn't appear to be that familiar with legislation and its application. Failed to apply basic risk management and tended to just get in and do the job using known methods to them rather than consulting stakeholders to assess the best and safest way to achieve a safe outcome.

More information

NSW Resources

Resources Regulator

Mining Competence Team

T: 1300 814 609 (Options 2 and Options 3)

Email: competencies@dpird.nsw.gov.au

Acknowledgments

Open cut examiner of coal mines other than underground coal mines examination panel

© State of New South Wales through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 2025. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (March 2025) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.