

170m barrier demolished,
"missing" letter found



Chief Operating Officer Dinghy Pattinson and Family Reference Group member Rowdy Durbridge with the NZ Mines Rescue Service letter promising to return.



Chief Operating Officer Dinghy Pattinson and Family Reference Group member Sonya Rockhouse excited to see the first rubble from the 170m barrier that was deconstructed last week.

Missing letter found during 170m barrier removal

The “missing letter” left by a NZ Mines Rescue team at the Pike River Mine drift 170m barrier in 2011 has finally been found.

The team that built the barrier in 2011 attached the letter which was a promise to return. In recent months when the Pike River Recovery Agency recovered the drift up to the 170m barrier, the letter could not be found and a replacement had been placed on the outbye (external) side of the drift.

Family Reference Group members Rowdy Durbridge and Sonya Rockhouse were at the mine site last week to witness the removal of the barrier. While looking at

the barrier rubble brought out of the mine drift, Rowdy spotted something that looked out of place, and it turned out to be the missing letter, slightly worse for wear.

Rowdy was the last person to see this letter outside of the Mines Rescue team, before it was placed at the seal, so it was an emotional moment for both Rowdy and Dinghy.

“We couldn’t work out what had happened to the letter, but finally we have it back. It must have been covered over at some stage. It’s being dried out and together with the Family Reference Group, we’ll decide what to do next with it,” Chief Operating Officer Dinghy Pattinson says.

The Agency first stepped through the 170m barrier just before Christmas, after two weeks of ventilating the 2.3km drift access tunnel with fresh air.

Last week Agency miners trained by NZ Police completed a forensic search and examination of the area immediately in-by (on the internal side) the barrier. Mining teams are recovering the drift in approximately 20m sections with support from NZ Police specialists who are on-site to coordinate the forensic examination, and to receive and process any items that may be of interest to the on-going criminal investigation.

“Police and the Agency will be keeping the families fully informed as to any items of interest located within the drift but won’t be commenting publicly on any matters relevant to the criminal investigation. Any new information collected from the drift that may be of relevance to the 2011 coronial findings will be referred to the Chief Coroner for consideration,” Police’s on-site Operation Commander Acting Superintendent David Greig says.

The 2011 inquest concluded that 29 men died at Pike River Mine on 19 November 2010 following a large explosion.

Removing the barrier marks the start of the next phase which will be to advance safely up the rest of the drift over coming months.

“We’ll now be able to get machinery into the main part of the drift, including the loader and drill rigs which will enable additional roof support to be installed where required,” Agency Chief Operating Officer Dinghy Pattinson says.

“We’ll be using a driftrunner to get our teams up to where they will be working. Our plans dictate that we never have more than six men underground at any one time, and we have a six man refuge chamber that will be advanced as we move up the drift. There are also a number of other controls in place to mitigate the risks of working underground – these are outlined in the various plans available to anyone on our website.

“The mine was closed for two weeks over the Christmas period and we have confirmed the atmosphere underground has remained in a stable condition,” he says.

Read all about it...

The latest tranche of weekly briefings from the Agency to the Minister Responsible for Pike River Re-entry Hon Andrew Little are available in the [Documents](#) section of the Agency website. The latest WorkSafe mine entry record and the Agency's response are also available in the Documents section.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) are available on the Te Kāhui Whakamana Rua Tekau mā Iwa - Pike River Recovery Agency website.

If you want to ask something specific, email us at info@pikeriverrecovery.govt.nz. Please direct any media queries to media@pikeriverrecovery.govt.nz.

Ngā mihi,

The Pike River Recovery Agency team



Email: info@pikeriverrecovery.govt.nz

Phone: +64 3 966 9210

Write: PO Box 414, Greymouth 7840

Fax: +64 3 966 9230

Physical address: Unit 3, 36-46 Tainui Street, Greymouth 7805

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