

## **Frequently Asked Questions About The Mine Entry Inspection Programme**

### **1. Who is responsible for the mine entry inspection programme?**

The Coal Authority is responsible for the inspection programme.

### **2. Who is the Coal Authority?**

The Coal Authority is a government organisation which works to protect the public and the environment in coal mining areas. We offer support in managing the effects of past coal mining in order to promote public safety and safeguard the landscape – now and for future generations:

- We manage our property in a responsible manner and deal with any emergencies arising from old coal mine workings;
- We help to clean up water from coal mines; and
- We give people advice and information about past coal mining.

Visit [www.coal.gov.uk](http://www.coal.gov.uk) for more information about the Coal Authority.

### **3. Which government department sponsors the Coal Authority?**

The Coal Authority is sponsored by the Department for Energy and Climate Change. It is a Non-Departmental Public Body, which was established by Parliament under the Coal Industry Act 1994.

### **4. How long has the mine entry inspection programme been going on?**

Our current inspection programme began in 2007 and we have inspected 27,000 mine shafts since then. Over the next few years we plan to inspect over 50,000 mines shafts in built-up areas.

### **5. Why are you doing this now? Is there a new danger?**

There is no new danger. There has been coal mining in Britain since Roman times and problems with mine shafts are very rare. We want to ensure that our records are as accurate and up to date as possible and to identify whether we need to carry out any work, (this work will be at our expense). We have therefore taken the decision that the best way to do this is to extend our inspection programme. If we identify any issues, we will act quickly to put them right.

### **6. How will the mine entry inspection programme work?**

The Coal Authority's team of specialist inspectors will visit over 30,000 mine shafts in built-up areas during 2010. We will visually inspect the recorded location of each mine shaft, identify any signs of its presence and identify any issues. If there are issues associated with the mine shaft or there is evidence of coal mining subsidence, we will act quickly to put it right. If we don't identify

any problems, we will send a copy of our findings and a map showing the recorded position of the mine shaft on the property.

### **7. Are the public in any immediate danger?**

There is no new danger. Very occasionally old mine shafts can cause problems and you should never explore a mine shaft yourself. If a mine shaft looks dangerous, has caused damage or allows access to the mine, please call our emergency line on 01623 646 333.

### **8. What problems can mine shafts cause?**

Problems with mine shafts are very rare but they can cause cases of coal mining subsidence. Our inspections are intended to make sure that mine shafts are not open; we expect less than 1 in 200 of the mine shafts we visit have any issues. Disturbing old mines can be dangerous, so never explore a mine shaft yourself.

### **9. Will you be making all the mine shafts safe?**

Many mine shafts were treated or filled when the mines closed and local residents may not even know there were once coal mines in their area. We will be visiting all recorded mine shafts over the next few years to check on their condition. If we find any issues, we will act quickly to promote public safety and safeguard the environment.

### **10. Do you have records of all the mine shafts in Britain?**

No. We have records of over 170,000 mine shafts. We can't be certain we know exactly where every single shaft is since there has been coal mining since Roman times. However, we maintain the National Coal Mining Database, including maps going back to 1750.

### **11. What other organisations are involved?**

We work with 180 local authorities in coal mining areas as well as other public and private sector organisations. These include Members of Parliament; the Scottish Government; the Welsh Assembly; the Department for Energy and Climate Change; Network Rail; The Highways Agency; Law Society; Council of Mortgage Lenders; the Police and many local businesses.

### **12. What should people do if they think they need an inspection?**

If we have records of a mine shaft on your property, you will get a letter inviting you to book an appointment as part of the inspection programme. If you are worried that a mine shaft looks dangerous or there has been a change in its condition, call our 24-hour emergency line on:

01623 646 333.

### **13. Who will pay for the inspections?**

The inspections are paid for by the Coal Authority.

## About the inspection

### 14. When will the inspectors come round?

If you live in a former mining area and have a mine shaft on your property, you will receive a letter telling you when our inspectors are in your area. To book an appointment, call: 0845 762 6848. If you are worried about the condition of a mine shaft or there has been a change in its condition, call our 24-hour emergency line on 01623 646 333. All Coal Authority inspectors carry identification.

### 15. How long will the inspection take?

The inspection will take about 20 minutes. Our inspectors will look around the outside of your property to check on the condition of any mine shafts. They will show you the recorded position of the shaft and answer any questions you may have.

### 16. What happens if the inspector finds an issue?

The Coal Authority is responsible in most cases for the condition of the mine shaft and to pay for repair of damage due to coal mining subsidence. If the problem is serious, we will make it safe as quickly as possible. The Authority inspectors will stay in touch on a regular basis and you'll have their contact details in case of an emergency.

### 17. What kinds of issue are you looking for?

Some of the conditions we are looking for include:

- Old brickwork, mine shaft markers or covers that may need maintenance;
- A depression near the mine shaft;
- Cracks in structures or in the ground by the mine shaft;
- A boggy area or water flowing from the mine shaft.

Even if any of these are present, it does not necessarily mean there is a problem. It is very dangerous to explore mine shafts yourself.

### 18. Will you be in touch again if the inspector doesn't find any issues?

We will send you a copy of our report and a map showing the recorded position of the mine shaft on your property. We will carry out a follow-up inspection within the next few years.

## About any repair work

### 19. How likely it is that repair work will need to be done?

It is very unlikely. Many mine shafts have been treated or filled in the past and problems are very rare. The Coal Authority deals with about 500 incidents each year, of which only half are found to be caused by coal mining.

## **20. What is the process for claiming for repairs?**

If the inspection highlights possible damage at the time of the inspection, we will give you a copy of our claims pack *Coal mining subsidence damages: a guide to claimants' rights*.

## **21. Who will pay for the work?**

If we find that a problem has been caused by past coal mining, in the majority of cases we will pay to put it right.

## **22. If you do repair work, will it disrupt essential services such as water and electricity?**

It is very unlikely, but it depends on the location of the mine shaft and the extent of any risk or damage. Where possible we will avoid any disruption to essential services.

## **23. If you do repair work, will it disrupt roads and public transport?**

It is very unlikely, but it depends on the location of the mine shaft and the extent of any risk or damage. Where possible we will avoid any disruption to essential services and transport.

## **24. As well as putting things right, will the Coal Authority pay for safety measures such as fencing and signage?**

The Coal Authority will pay for measures to promote public safety – such as fencing and signage – if a mine shaft is dangerous.

## **About safety**

### **25. I've never worried about the mine shaft before. Is it safe?**

Many mine shafts were treated or filled in when the mines closed and problems with mine shafts are very rare. We expect less than 1 in 200 of the mine shafts we visit have any issues but it's important that we make sure that the mine shaft is not open. You should never explore a mine shaft yourself.

### **26. Will the condition of the mine shaft change?**

It can be hard to predict further changes over time as natural elements, such as rain, can affect mine shafts. If you are worried about the condition of a mine shaft or that it allows access to the mine, please call our 24-hour emergency line on: 01623 646 333.

### **27. How many people does this affect?**

Over seven million households – a quarter of the British population – live in coalfield areas. Most of these households live in areas where deep mining took place, and are therefore hundreds of metres above the mines. There are approximately 50,000 mine entries in built up areas.

### **28. Is it safe to build near a mine shaft?**

If you want to build above or near a mine shaft, we can provide information and advice. Depending on what you want to do, you may need our permission – as disturbing old mines can be dangerous. If you're using a contractor, make sure he or she knows about the mine shaft. You can call our building advice line on 0845 762 6848 for more information.

## **About the impact of the inspection programme**

### **29. Should I tell my insurer about the mine shaft?**

The existence of an old mine shaft on your property does not constitute a change in circumstances. You should check the terms of your agreement in case you have a responsibility to tell them. The Authority will be pleased to clarify any concerns your insurer has about the mineshaft and its recorded position.

### **30. Should I tell my bank or building society about the mine shaft?**

Your lender should have been advised at the time of purchase of the presence of the mineshaft.