



# DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

## OFFICE OF MINE RECLAMATION

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## California's Abandoned Mine Lands Program Fact Sheet Stay Out - Stay Alive!

Nearly every year, people are killed or injured in abandoned mines. They or their pets may also require rescuing by trained personnel, putting these people at risk. More than three dozen incidents have already been reported in California this decade (see summaries on page 2). The AMLU encourages you to **"Stay Out - Stay Alive!"** This message is part of a national campaign to warn the public about the dangers associated with abandoned mines (see [www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp](http://www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp)).

In 2008, the Abandoned Mine Lands Unit (AMLU), Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), and other agencies collaborated on a DVD that contains two personal stories revealing the dangers of California's abandoned mines. Video clips from the DVD can be viewed at [www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Isaac.wvx](http://www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Isaac.wvx) and [www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Rusty.wvx](http://www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Rusty.wvx).



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### 1. What should I do in an emergency involving an abandoned mine?

**Call 911 or contact your local sheriff's office.** If someone is injured due to a fall or is trapped in an abandoned mine, do not try to rescue the victim yourself. Rescue attempts should only be made by professionals with proper training and equipment to avoid further injury to the victim or yourself.

#### 2. How do I report an abandoned mine other than in an emergency situation?

You can call the AMLU using its toll-free hotline at **1-877-OLD-MINE (1-877-653-6463)**.

#### 3. Are abandoned mines dangerous?

**Yes.** Many abandoned mines in California date back to the Gold Rush and can be an irresistible and deadly draw for children and adults. Dangers include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Vertical shafts can be shallow to hundreds of feet deep. At the surface, they may be unprotected, hidden by vegetation, or covered by rotting boards. Waste rock piles may look like a fun place to jump over with a bike or ATV, but open shafts may lie on the other side.
- Unstable rock and rotting timbers may present falling hazards. Darkness and debris add to the hazards and can disorient visitors, leaving them lost underground.
- Pockets of oxygen-depleted air or lethal gas (e.g., carbon monoxide) can cause asphyxiation.
- Abandoned mines are often used as habitat by wildlife, including rattlesnakes.
- Blasting caps or dynamite left behind can be extremely unstable and may detonate at any time.
- Environmental hazards at abandoned mine sites can harm humans and wildlife. Visitors can be exposed to high levels of lead, mercury, and/or cyanide left over from the processing of ore. Dust from disturbed, naturally-occurring arsenic or asbestos, or diseases such as hantavirus or valley fever, may cause health problems. Water in a mine can react with sulfide-bearing rock to produce acid-generating conditions and leach heavy metals from rock (acid rock drainage).

# CALIFORNIA'S ABANDONED MINES

## REPORTED FATAL & "NEAR MISS"\* ACCIDENTS (2000-2009)



### 2009

- **Nevada Co.** Local firefighters rescued a 137-pound dog from an abandoned mine shaft along an Irrigation District ditch near the dog owner's property.
- **Inyo Co.** A 22-year-old man died after falling off a highwall of a glory hole at the Tungsten Blue Mine.
- **Kern Co.** A 20-year-old man fell into an unmarked abandoned mine shaft. He reported that he was "okay."
- **Tuolumne Co.** Rescuers pulled a dog from a 40-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A 15-year-old boy rode his trail bike into a 20-foot-deep mine shaft. He suffered a puncture wound to his left upper arm.

### 2008

- **Tuolumne Co.** A man was rescued with minor injuries 30 hours after he fell 100 feet into a winze in an abandoned mine and landed in a five-foot-deep pool of water.
- **Madera Co.** Three men in their 20s died from carbon monoxide poisoning in an abandoned gold mine they had dewatered and were exploring.
- **Placer Co.** Firefighters rescued a dog from a 40-foot-deep shaft hidden in undergrowth near a popular trail. Park rangers later found a deer in another shaft nearby.

### 2007

- **Kern Co.** An 11-year-old boy taking pictures of an abandoned mine fell into a shaft breaking several bones.
- **Kern Co.** An SUV was found in an abandoned mine shaft in an area not designated for off-road travel.
- **Plumas Co.** A man died after he was thrown from his motorcycle on a rocky trail at an abandoned quarry.
- **Kern Co.** A woman nearly drove her quad into a 500-foot-deep shaft; after riding up a "hill" (waste rock from the shaft), her front wheels rolled off the shaft's edge.

### 2006

- **Kern Co.** A 9-year-old motorcyclist who fell 40 feet into a shaft was rescued and hospitalized.
- **El Dorado Co.** Two workers, who entered an abandoned mine to pump water to a water tanker, died after becoming overcome by the pump's fumes.
- **Riverside Co.** A man riding an off-road vehicle fell 40 feet down an abandoned mine shaft; 18 firefighters worked approximately seven hours to rescue him.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A man was paralyzed after falling into the same shaft a man died in a week earlier; about 60 emergency workers helped to rescue him.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A man died after walking into an adit and falling 50 feet down an internal shaft.
- **Imperial Co.** Two men were rescued after they drove into a shaft and were trapped for about 20 hours.
- **San Bernardino Co.** The Trona Fire Department pulled a dog from a mine shaft.

### 2005

- **Alameda Co.** A man doing off-road tricks in a pickup slid off the steep edge of an abandoned quarry and hundreds of feet into a back yard. He was uninjured.
- **Kern Co.** A mine rescue team pulled a dog from a 50-foot-deep shaft, a half-mile from a community college.
- **Kern Co.** A mine rescue team pulled two men from a 40-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.

### 2004

- **Kern Co.** A man driving with his family on a dirt road nearly backed into a 53-foot-deep shaft (his car's left rear tire was hanging over the shaft edge).
- **San Bernardino Co.** A 21-year-old motorcyclist died after falling about 700 feet into an uncovered shaft.
- **Riverside Co.** A 16-year-old girl suffered head injuries after falling 50 feet into an abandoned quarry.
- **Inyo Co.** A dog was rescued about one month after falling into a 30-foot-deep abandoned mine pit.
- **Kern Co.** An 11-year-old boy was injured after he and his dirt bike fell into a 40-foot-deep shaft.

### 2003

- **Kern Co.** A 13-year-old boy was injured when he fell 30 feet down an internal shaft in an adit.
- **Del Norte Co.** A man died and his son was injured after their vehicle drove into a 70-foot-deep air shaft.
- **Butte Co.** A dog was rescued about eight weeks after it fell into a 50-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.
- **Kern Co.** A 32-year-old motorcyclist was injured after falling about 50 feet into a shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A 14-year-old motorcyclist fell 25 feet into a shaft and was rescued by his father.

### 2002

- **Orange Co.** Two brothers died while exploring a flooded, abandoned mine.
- **Kern Co.** A 10-year-old boy was rescued after he fell 200 feet down a shaft. He had no major injuries.
- **El Dorado Co.** Firefighters rescued a dog that had spent four hours in a flooded mine shaft.

### 2001

- **Placer Co.** Two boys found the body of a man who had drowned in deep water in an abandoned quarry.
- **San Diego Co.** A 16-year-old boy drowned in a quarry swimming hole that was cordoned off due to its dangers.

### 2000

- **Riverside Co.** Firefighters rescued a 35-year-old man who was trapped for two days after falling into an old quarry. He was treated for dehydration and bruises.
- **El Dorado Co.** Firefighters rescued a 47-year-old man from a shaft. He had broken bones, cuts, and bruises.

\* Accidents that could have resulted in a fatality, but did not (see also [www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp](http://www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp)).