

Safety – Stay Out, Stay Alive!

[Video – Dangers of Legacy Abandoned Mines](#)  
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Each year people, pets, livestock, and wildlife are involved in accidents at abandoned mines.



Department of Conservation staff promoting safety at abandoned mines. Photo: DOC

Motorcyclists, other off-highway vehicles, hikers, children, or animals fall down unexpected mine shafts, die from lack of oxygen, or are otherwise harmed at legacy abandoned mines, often located on public lands. Such accidents can also put trained rescue personnel at risk. The Department is aware of more than 50 accidents reported in California since 1990 (Table 3). Accident data at legacy abandoned mines is not officially collected. The AMLP has kept a database of accidents and fatalities as they are reported in the media. From these sources, in the past 15 years at least 18 people have died and 40 people have been injured at abandoned mines throughout mostly mountain and desert regions

of California.

The Abandoned Mine Lands Program (AMLP) encourages you to **“Stay Out - Stay Alive!”** This message is part of a national campaign to warn the public about the dangers associated with legacy abandoned mines (see <http://www.msha.gov/sosa/sosahome.asp>).

In 2008, the AMLP, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), and other agencies collaborated on a DVD containing two personal stories revealing the dangers of California’s abandoned mines.

[Video – Dangers of Legacy Abandoned Mines](#)

<http://www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Isaac.wvx> and  
<http://www.msha.gov/streaming/wvx/sosa/Rusty.wvx>.

Table 3. Accidents and fatalities at legacy abandoned mines in California reported in the media and tracked by OMR from 2000-2015. Source: OMR

### 2015

- **Tuolumne Co.** An uninjured Brahma cow named Molly fell into a 35 foot deep abandoned mine shaft and was rescued 3 days later by a veterinary crew from U.C. Davis.
- **Placer Co.** A body was discovered in an old quarry, no leads to what had caused the death.
- **Riverside Co.** Two men rescued a female pitbull after shining a light down an abandoned mine shaft. They used a rope to climb down and retrieve the dog.

### 2014

- **Placer Co.** A teen (17) fell down from a 150 feet highwall at an abandoned placer mine.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A body was found in an abandoned mine shaft from a possible homicide.
- **Nevada Co.** An elderly man (70) was riding an ATV with his family and drove into an abandoned mine shaft. He fell about 30 feet into the shaft. He was later airlifted to a nearby hospital for moderate injuries.

### 2013

- **Mariposa Co.** A man (61) and his friend were exploring an abandoned mine shaft when it collapsed on him. The man was pinned down by a large rock below the shoulders.

### 2012

- **Kern Co.** A man had become entrapped in an open pit while mining for gold.

### 2011

- **San Bernardino Co.** A man (34) jumped over a chain link fence and climbed down a wooden ladder. The ladder gave way and the man fell 50 feet down into the shaft sustaining minor injuries.
- **Tuolumne Co.** Four men went scuba diving in an abandoned quarry and two of the men drowned.
- **Riverside Co.** A vehicle that was stuck down 60 feet inside an abandoned mine shaft was spotted by a hiker.

### 2010

- **Kern Co.** A boy (17) fell into a 30 feet deep abandoned mine shaft and fractured his spine.

### 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.
- **Kern Co.** A male (unknown age) was rescued after falling with his motorcycle 12 feet down a mine shaft. He was reportedly bruised but had no broken bones.
- **Inyo Co.** A man (22) died after falling off a highwall of a glory hole at the Tungsten Blue Mine.
- **Kern Co.** A man (20) 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 boy (15) rode his trail bike into a 20-foot-deep mine shaft. He injured his left arm.

### 2008

- **Tuolumne Co.** A man (34) was rescued 30 hours after he fell 100 feet down a winze inside an abandoned mine and landed in five feet of water. He had minor injuries.
- **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.** A boy (11) 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 (41) 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 boy (9) who fell with his motorcycle 40 feet into a shaft was rescued and hospitalized.
- **El Dorado Co.** Two workers (49 & 32), 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 (27) on 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 (34) 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 (41) died after walking into an adit and falling 50 feet down an internal shaft.
- **Imperial Co.** Two men (62 & 67) were rescued 40 hours after they drove an SUV into a mine shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** The Trona Fire Department pulled a dog from a mine shaft.
- **Alameda Co.** A pickup truck driver crashed in a quarry (a similar accident occurred at this quarry in 2005).

## 2005

- **Alameda Co.** A man (23) 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 (28 & 26) from a 40-foot-deep abandoned mine shaft.

## 2004-2000

- **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 motorcyclist (21) died after falling about 700 feet into an uncovered shaft.
- **Riverside Co.** A teen (16) 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.** A boy (11) was injured after he and his dirt bike fell into a 40-foot-deep shaft.
- **Kern Co.** A boy (13) was injured when he fell 30 feet down an internal shaft in an adit.
- **Del Norte Co.** A man (45) died and his son (19) was injured after their off-road vehicle drove into an 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 motorcyclist (32) was injured after falling about 50 feet into a shaft.
- **San Bernardino Co.** A motorcyclist (14) fell 25 feet into a shaft and was rescued by his father.
- **Orange Co.** Two brothers (18 & 23) died while exploring a flooded, abandoned mine.
- **Kern Co.** A boy (10) 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.
- **Placer Co.** Two boys found the body of a man who had drowned in deep water in an abandoned quarry.
- **San Diego Co.** A boy (16) drowned in a quarry swimming hole that was cordoned off due to its dangers.
- **Riverside Co.** Firefighters rescued a man (35) 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 man (47) from a mine shaft. He had broken bones, cuts, and bruises.

## How to Report a Hazard

The public may report abandoned mines by calling this toll-free number, 877-OLD-MINE, or sending an email to the Office of Mine Reclamation at [OMR@conservation.ca.gov](mailto:OMR@conservation.ca.gov). Please include the location and description of the mine site or feature. Location should include the name of the nearest road and a GPS location point with latitude and longitude.

Additional safety and hazard information is available on the website of the federal [Mine Safety and Health Administration](#).

## 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 AMLP using its toll-free hotline at **1-877-OLD-MINE (1-877-653-6463)**.

3. Are abandoned mines dangerous?

Yes! Every year, people are injured or killed in accidents on abandoned mine lands (AML) in California, which is why the AMLP's motto is "**Stay Out! Stay Alive!**" This message is part of a national campaign to warn the public about dangers associated with abandoned mines, sponsored by [MSHA](#).

Many mines in California that are now abandoned date back to the Gold Rush, were temporary by their nature, and can be an irresistible, and sometimes deadly, draw for children and adults. For the explorer, hiker, off-roader, or rock hound, abandoned mine hazards are not always apparent. Reasons why abandoned mines are dangerous include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Because removing rock weakens structural integrity, miners compensated by adding support inside mines as needed and by accepting any dangers involved in working in a mine. Horizontal abandoned mine openings may seem sturdy, but rotting timbers and unstable rock formations make cave-ins a real danger.
- Vertical shafts can be hundreds of feet deep. At the surface, they may be completely unprotected, hidden by vegetation, or covered by rotting boards.
- Internal workings such as *winzes*, *drifts*, and *stopes* may present falling hazards. Darkness and debris add to the hazards and can disorient visitors, leaving them lost underground.
- Blasting caps or dynamite left behind can be extremely unstable and may detonate at any time.
- Visitors to an abandoned mine may encounter pockets of oxygen-depleted air or lethal gas (such as carbon monoxide) that can cause asphyxiation.

- Dust particles originating from abandoned mine sites may cause health problems due to naturally-occurring elements such as asbestos, arsenic, or chromium, or diseases such as hanta-virus or valley fever.
- Abandoned mines are often used as habitat by wildlife, including rattlesnakes.
- Chemical and environmental hazards created by mines can pose health threats to visitors, the public at large, and wildlife. Water in a mine can react with sulfide-bearing rock to produce acid-generating conditions. This acid-bearing water is capable of leaching heavy metals from rock, creating acid rock drainage, also called acid mine drainage. Visitors can also be exposed to high levels of toxic waste left over from the processing of ore.