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Deep into the Copper Mines of Chile

On the 18th of December 2001, Walter Chile gave its third Abrasive Safety Seminar in the Codelco Copper Mine at El Teniente, Chile, 80km south east of Santiago. This seminar deserves special mention, as it was given in the new sector of the mine (the “Esmeralda SUB 6 AREA”) 8 km deep into the mountainside!



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The El Teniente Mine is operated by Codelco, the largest Chilean company. In this mine alone there are 5,785 employees. They process 35,000,000 tons of ore annually with an ore grade of 1.16% (one of the highest in the world). Each new sector of the mine has a planned operating life of 28 years.

El Teniente has over 2,400 km of galleries and tunnels. In this working environment, safety is of the highest importance, as you will discover through the following account of our visit:

Before entering the tunnels, Mario Munne (Our Distributor) and I, had to equip ourselves with the mandatory safety equipment: steel-toed shoes, special battery belts for the mining lamps; special helmets with mining lamps, safety jackets, safety glasses; gloves; emergency phones, and air-tight Stainless steel boxes (20x10x10 cm) to carry on our belts. This box has a safety device capable of extracting oxygen in sufficient quantity to breath for 24 hours.

Our trip down into the tunnels was by bus. On two occasions the bus stopped for 15 minutes at traffic lights. Although there were no other vehicles in sight, the driver respected the security norms of the mine.

I conducted the Safety Seminar to 19 miners, who were all equipped with the same safety gear. Yet none were aware of the importance of the manufacturing process and choice of raw materials to ensure that a grinding wheel is safe. This was also the first opportunity that they had to learn of the proper way of working with these potentially dangerous tools that they handle on a regular basis. The group of miners was very pleased with the Safety Seminar. The one miner that had initially been the most skeptical about the potential benefits of attending this seminar later accompanied us through 500 meters of obscure tunnels to the manager's office to thank him personally for having taken the initiative of inviting us to present the Safety Seminar.



The manager then gave instructions to the purchasing agent to place an initial order for Walter products.

Marcelo Blaser
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