

Contracting giant increases simulator emphasis

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For Immediate Release

Major Australian contract mining service provider Thiess has extended its use of Advanced Equipment (AE) Simulators for operator training into four states as part of a strategy to combat skills and labour shortages, and achieve superior training outcomes.

The Brisbane-based engineering and contracting giant has achieved positive results with an Immersive Technologies AE simulator at several Queensland mine sites over the past two years. Use of the technology in Western Australia and New South Wales has also produced positive training results.

Thiess has also been successfully using Immersive Technologies AE Simulators at its coal operations in Indonesia for the last 5 years.

The company plans to use AE Simulators to train hundreds of new and existing operators at the Prominent Hill copper-gold mine in South Australia, in the Hunter Valley coal mining district in New South Wales, and at the Mt Keith nickel mine in Western Australia.

Andy Haslam, Thiess' WA and SA manager mining, said the need to train up a high number of inexperienced operators at Prominent Hill – where the contractor is working closely with mine owner Oxiana Ltd on regional recruitment and training – without slowing the pace of mine development and production activities made the simulator an extremely valuable tool.

“It costs us a lot of money to train people and it’s actually quicker and easier to put them in a simulator,” Haslam said.

“That way it doesn’t disturb the production cycle. That’s one major benefit.”

“We can also do some pretty scary safety simulations in them without hurting anybody or the equipment. We pull fire drills on them, or a tyre blow-out on a ramp – you just can’t do that in a real situation.”

“So more than anything it’s the safety and the training efficiency, and not upsetting the production cycle during that (training) process, that’s beneficial. And the whole training process is a lot quicker: we reckon we’re taking two weeks off the typical four-week training cycle for new operators.”

Thiess also uses simulators to test trainee aptitude during the operator assessment phase.

Haslam said at least 150 people would go through simulator training programs in the first year of simulator use at Prominent Hill. The \$A775 million project is gearing up for production of 90,000 tonnes per annum of copper and 115,000ozpa of gold from an eight million tonnes-per-annum plant in the second half of 2008.

While the initial focus at the mine is on haul truck operator training with the simulator, Thiess also plans to use it to train hydraulic excavator operators.

In NSW, a major training program involving up to 350 equipment operators at three mines in the Hunter Valley will see an Immersive Technologies AE Simulator used to put dozer, wheel loader and truck operators through their paces.

Thiess NSW manager operations, mining, Brett Lewis said the trainees would include “cleanskins” and more experienced operators put through procedure review and refresher courses.

He also plans to introduce a hydraulic excavator module to the simulator training mix.

“We have a pretty big program planned, and that could involve several current and new sites,” Lewis said.

“We are developing how best to use the simulator in terms of where we put the emphasis in our training, how the simulator works best in conjunction with other training tools and procedures, etc. But we’ve seen that the machines (simulators) have been quite successful and have become a valuable part of the training and induction that we do.”

Lewis said a focus would be using simulator training to coach operators on best practice in areas such as braking and use of truck retarder systems.

“Unless you’re in the vehicle with them it is impossible to see first hand and pick up engine overspeed and over-use of brakes, use of the retarder and park brakes,” he said.

“We’ve seen though how these things can be easily observed and modified in the simulator so that we’re not just getting people to recognise the effect of what they’re doing on a safety basis, but also on maintenance.

“That is, how the correct operating procedures can improve component life and, in the case of things like engine overspeeds, prevent significant extra expense.”

Thiess is one of a number of mining contractors successfully deploying Advanced Equipment Simulators within their operations. Others include MacMahon, BGC Contracting and Roche (Zinifex Century Alliance).

About Immersive Technologies

Established in 1993, Immersive Technologies is the leading global provider of operator training simulators to the mining and earthmoving industries.

With more than 100 AE simulators utilising 300 Conversion Kit™ modules deployed in 19 countries around the world, the company’s simulators are integral to the operations of many world-leading mining companies who use the technology to improve operational safety and efficiency while driving down maintenance costs.

Immersive Technologies’ exclusive alliances with five leading Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) ensures its extensive range of Advanced Equipment Simulators achieve a superior level of realism and accuracy through the use of exclusively licensed proprietary data and machine technical information from the OEM.

The company’s expanding customer support base includes offices in Australia, the USA and South Africa.

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