International Journal of Science and Research Archive

eISSN: 2582-8185

Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/ijsra

Journal homepage: https://ijsra.net/

(Research Article)

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The role of equipment maintenance in mining safety

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 16(02), 525-531

Publication history: Received on 04 May 2025; revised on 09 August 2025; accepted on 11 August 2025

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2025.16.2.1822

Abstract

This paper delves into the critical significance of equipment maintenance in ensuring safety within the mining industry. By analyzing data from 40 diverse mining sites over a three - year period, a series of statistical analyses using SPSS and Rare conducted. The research reveals that regular and effective equipment maintenance, especially preventive and predictive maintenance strategies, has a substantial negative correlation with equipment - related accident rates. The findings provide actionable insights for mining companies to optimize their maintenance programs, reduce accident risks, and enhance overall operational safety and efficiency.

Keywords: Maintenance Frequency; Equipment Ag; Usage Intensity; Safety Performance; Equipment Maintenance

1. Introduction

Mining operations are highly reliant on a wide array of specialized equipment, ranging from massive haul trucks and excavators to intricate ventilation and drainage systems. The proper functioning of this equipment is not only crucial for production but also for the safety of miners. Malfunctioning equipment can lead to a plethora of hazards, including machinery - related injuries, cave - ins due to faulty support systems, and exposure to toxic substances from ventilation failures. Despite the well - known importance of equipment maintenance, many mining companies struggle with implementing efficient and effective maintenance practices. This paper aims to empirically explore the relationship between different types of equipment maintenance and safety in the mining industry, using real - world data and advanced statistical techniques.

2. Literature review

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the strong link between equipment maintenance and safety in mining. Brown (2017) conducted a case study on a copper mining operation and found that an increase in the frequency of preventive maintenance led to a 25% reduction in equipment - related accidents over a two - year period. Green (2018) analyzed data from multiple mining sites and reported that companies implementing predictive maintenance techniques had a 30% lower rate of unexpected equipment breakdowns compared to those relying solely on reactive maintenance. However, most of these existing studies have limitations. Many focus on a single type of mining equipment or a small number of mining sites, lacking a comprehensive view of the diverse maintenance - safety relationship across different mining operations. There is also a need to understand how different maintenance strategies interact with each other and with other factors, such as equipment age and usage intensity, to influence safety outcomes. This study aims to address these gaps.

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3. Data Collection

3.1. Data Sources

Data was collected from 40 mining sites across various regions and mining sectors, including coal mines, gold mines, and iron ore mines. The data collection period covered three years, from 2020 - 2022. The primary data sources included

- Company Maintenance Records: Detailed logs of all maintenance activities, including the date of maintenance, type of maintenance (preventive, corrective, or predictive), equipment identification, maintenance personnel involved, and the parts replaced or repaired.
- Equipment - Related Accident Reports: Information on accidents directly caused by equipment failures, such as the nature of the accident, the injured party, the equipment involved, and the time of occurrence.
- Equipment Specifications and Usage Data: Details about each piece of equipment, including its age, manufacturer, model, usage hours per month, and the specific tasks it was assigned to perform in the mining operation.

3.2. Variable Definition

3.2.1. Dependent Variable

- Equipment - Related Accident Rate: Calculated as the number of equipment - related accidents per 100 pieces of equipment per year. This metric standardizes the accident frequency across different mining sites with varying equipment inventories.

3.2.2. Independent Variables

- Maintenance Frequency: The total number of maintenance activities performed on each piece of equipment in a year. This includes all types of maintenance (preventive, corrective, and predictive).
- Maintenance Type: Categorized into three types - Preventive Maintenance (PM), which involves regular inspections, lubrication, and component replacements based on a fixed schedule; Corrective Maintenance (CM), which is carried out after an equipment failure has occurred; and Predictive Maintenance (PdM), which uses sensors and data analytics to detect potential failures before they happen.
- Equipment Age: Measured in years from the date of manufacture of the equipment. Older equipment may be more prone to failures and require more frequent maintenance.
- Usage Intensity: Calculated as the average number of operating hours per month for each piece of equipment. Higher usage intensity can lead to increased wear and tear and potentially more accidents.

4. Data Preparation

4.1. Data Cleaning in SPSS

The data was first imported into SPSS for cleaning. Missing values were identified using the Analyze > Missing Values Analysis function. For variables with a small percentage of missing values, such as maintenance frequency in some records, the median value was used for imputation. For variables with a larger proportion of missing values, such as certain details in accident reports, cases were removed if the missing information was critical for the analysis. Outliers in variables like equipment - related accident rate and usage intensity were detected using boxplots in SPSS. In some cases, extreme values were found to be due to data entry errors and were corrected.

4.2. Data Transformation in R

In R, the categorical maintenance type variable was transformed into dummy variables for use in regression analysis. The model. Matrix function was used to create these dummy variables. Additionally, the equipment age and usage intensity variables were log - transformed to normalize their distributions and reduce the impact of extreme values. This transformation was done using the log function in R. The transformed variables were then standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 using the scale function, ensuring that all variables were on a comparable scale for the subsequent statistical analysis.

4.3. Statistical Analysis

4.3.1. Descriptive Statistics in SPSS

Descriptive statistics for all variables were calculated in SPSS using the Analyze > Descriptive Statistics > Descriptives option. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Equipment - Related Accident Rate	3.2	1.5	0.5	7.8
Maintenance Frequency	6.5	2.1	2	12
% of Maintenance as PM	45.0	15.0	10.0	80.0
% of Maintenance as CM	30.0	12.0	5.0	60.0
% of Maintenance as Pd.M.	25.0	10.0	3.0	50.0
Equipment Age (years)	8.2	3.5	2	18
Usage Intensity (hours/month)	180.0	50.0	50.0	300.0

The average equipment - related accident rate was 3.2 accidents per 100 pieces of equipment per year, with a standard deviation of 1.5. The average maintenance frequency was 6.5 times per year for each piece of equipment. On average, 45% of the maintenance activities were preventive, 30% were corrective, and 25% were predictive. The average equipment age was 8.2 years, and the average usage intensity was 180 operating hours per month.

4.3.2. Correlation Analysis in SPSS

A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted in SPSS to explore the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated using the Analyze > Correlate > Bivariate option. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix

Variable	Equipment - Related Accident Rate	Maintenance Frequency	% of Maintenance as PM	% of Maintenance as CM	% of Maintenance as Pd.M.	Equipment Age	Usage Intensity
Equipment - Related Accident Rate	1.00	-0.70*	-0.65*	0.25*	-0.60*	0.40**	0.35*
Maintenance Frequency	-0.70*	1.00	0.30*	-0.45*	0.50**	-0.15	0.20
% of Maintenance as PM	-0.65*	0.30*	1.00	-0.55*	0.75***	-0.25	-0.10
% of Maintenance as CM	0.25*	-0.45*	-0.55*	1.00	-0.35*	0.30*	0.40**
% of Maintenance as Pd.M.	-0.60*	0.50**	0.75***	-0.35*	1.00	-0.20	-0.15
Equipment Age	0.40**	-0.15	-0.25	0.30*	-0.20	1.00	0.60***

Usage Intensity	0.35*	0.20	-0.10	0.40**	-0.15	0.60***	1.00

*Note: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, p < 0.05

The results showed a significant negative correlation between maintenance frequency and equipment - related accident rate ($r = -0.70$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher maintenance frequency is associated with lower accident rates. Both preventive maintenance ($r = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$) and predictive maintenance ($r = -0.60$, $p < 0.001$) had strong negative correlations with accident rates. Corrective maintenance showed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that a higher proportion of corrective maintenance may be indicative of underlying equipment problems. Equipment age and usage intensity had significant positive correlations with accident rates ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$ and $r = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$, respectively), as expected.

4.3.3. Regression Analysis in SPSS

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed in SPSS to determine the unique contribution of each independent variable to the prediction of equipment - related accident rate, while controlling for the other variables. The Analyze > Regression > Linear option was used, with equipment - related accident rate as the dependent variable and maintenance frequency, the dummy variables for maintenance type, equipment age, and usage intensity as the independent variables. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Results

Variable	**Beta (β)**	**Standard Error**	**t - value**	**p - value**
Maintenance Frequency	-0.35	0.08	**-4.38***	<0.001
PM (vs. Ref.)	-0.25	0.10	**-2.50***	0.01
CM (vs. Ref.)	0.15	0.12	1.25	0.21
Pd.M. (vs. Ref.)	-0.30	0.11	**-2.73***	0.008
Equipment Age	0.20	0.09	2.22*	0.03
Usage Intensity	0.18	0.08	2.25*	0.03

$R^2 = 0.62$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.58$, Reference category for maintenance type: None of the three (PM, CM, Pd.M.)

The overall model was significant ($F(6, 33) = 12.5$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 62% of the variance in equipment - related accident rate (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.58$). Maintenance frequency had a significant negative beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that a one - unit increase in maintenance frequency was associated with a 0.35 - unit decrease in accident rate, holding other variables constant. Both preventive maintenance ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$) and predictive maintenance ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$) had significant negative beta coefficients, suggesting that these types of maintenance are effective in reducing accident rates. Equipment age ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$) and usage intensity ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) had significant positive beta coefficients, meaning that older equipment and higher usage intensities are associated with higher accident rates.

4.3.4. Additional Analysis in R

In R, a path analysis was conducted to explore the direct and indirect effects of different variables on equipment - related accident rates. The lava a package was used for this analysis. The results showed that maintenance frequency had a direct negative effect on accident rates. Additionally, preventive and predictive maintenance influenced accident rates both directly and indirectly through their impact on maintenance frequency. For example, an increase in preventive maintenance led to an increase in overall maintenance frequency, which in turn reduced accident rates.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Main Findings

The study found a strong negative relationship between maintenance frequency and equipment - related accident rates. This indicates that more frequent maintenance activities are associated with a lower likelihood of equipment - related accidents. The multiple regression analysis further emphasized the importance of maintenance frequency, as it was a significant predictor of accident rates, even after controlling for other factors.

Preventive and predictive maintenance emerged as key factors in reducing accident rates. Both types of maintenance had significant negative impacts on accident rates in the regression analysis. Preventive maintenance, with its regular inspections and component replacements, helps to identify and address potential problems before they lead to failures. Predictive maintenance, which uses advanced technologies to detect early signs of equipment degradation, allows for proactive maintenance actions, thereby minimizing the risk of accidents.

In contrast, corrective maintenance did not have a significant negative impact on accident rates. In fact, it showed a weak positive correlation in the correlation analysis. This could be because corrective maintenance is reactive, addressing problems only after they have occurred, and may not be as effective in preventing future accidents compared to preventive and predictive maintenance.

Equipment age and usage intensity were also found to be significant predictors of accident rates. Older equipment and equipment with higher usage intensities were more likely to be involved in accidents. This highlights the need for mining companies to pay special attention to the maintenance of older and heavily used equipment.

5.2. Practical Implications

For mining companies, these findings have important practical implications. First, there should be an increased focus on increasing the overall maintenance frequency of all equipment. This may involve allocating more resources to the maintenance department, hiring additional maintenance personnel, or implementing more efficient maintenance scheduling systems.

Second, mining companies should prioritize the implementation and expansion of preventive and predictive maintenance strategies. This could include investing in advanced monitoring technologies, such as sensors and data analytics software, to enable more accurate predictive maintenance. Regular preventive maintenance schedules should be strictly adhered to, and efforts should be made to train maintenance personnel in the latest preventive and predictive maintenance techniques.

Finally, mining companies should develop customized maintenance plans for older equipment and equipment with high usage intensities. These plans may include more frequent inspections, more comprehensive component replacements, and closer monitoring of equipment performance. By taking these steps, mining companies can significantly reduce the risk of equipment - related accidents, improve the safety of their operations, and enhance overall productivity.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the data was collected from a sample of 40 mining sites, and the findings may not be applicable to all mining operations globally. Different mining regions, types of mining, and company - specific factors may influence the relationship between equipment maintenance and safety. Secondly, the study relied on company - reported data, which may be subject to reporting biases. For example, companies may underreport certain maintenance activities or accidents. Thirdly, the study only considered a limited number of variables, and there may be other factors, such as the quality of maintenance personnel, the availability of spare parts, and the company's safety culture, that could impact the relationship between equipment maintenance and accident rates.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence of the crucial role of equipment maintenance in ensuring safety in the mining industry. Through statistical analysis using SPSS and R, it has been shown that maintenance frequency, along with preventive and predictive maintenance strategies, is significantly associated with lower equipment - related accident rates. Mining companies can use these findings to optimize their equipment maintenance programs, reduce the risk of accidents, and create a safer working environment for their employees. Future research should aim to address the limitations of this study, expand the sample size, and consider a broader range of variables to further enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between equipment maintenance and mining safety.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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