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Proactive approach to Enhancing Tunnel Safety: A Comprehensive Analysis of Risk Factors and Mitigation Strategies

Rajeev Prasad, Kailash Thakur
Hindustan Construction Company Limited, Mumbai

Abstract- In worldwide, Tunnelling is an essential component of modern infrastructure development, poses significant occupational health and safety risks and construction activities are rapidly growing in parallel with the increase in urbanization, industry, trade and transportation necessity in the world. This study aims to identify and analyse the primary hazards associated with tunnelling construction activities, including drilling-blasting and mechanized excavation methods. A thorough literature review and statistical data analysis were conducted to understand the prevailing risks and explore effective mitigation measures. The findings highlight the importance of implementing robust safety protocols, proper ventilation systems, regular inspections, and worker training to minimize accidents and ensure a safe working environment.

Keywords- tunnelling, tunnel safety, occupational health, risk assessment, hazard mitigation, safety protocols.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tunnelling has become an indispensable part of urban development, transportation networks, and industrial infrastructure. While it offers numerous benefits, it also presents unique challenges related to occupational safety and health. This study investigates the factors contributing to tunnel accidents and proposes practical strategies to enhance safety standards.

Figure: -1 Display of Safety Instructions & Caution Signages in Tunnel

II. METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify existing research on tunnel safety, focusing on risk factors, accident statistics, and mitigation measures.

Additionally, statistical data from relevant sources were analysed to gain insights into the prevalence of different types of accidents and their potential causes.

Table 1 presents some hazards tunnelling and the precautions to be taken against them.

Hazard may be many more as per work site conditions and may arise from work environment during execution of work.

Pre assessment of all high-risk activities to identify hazards and risk involve in the process and ensure preventive measures as according to risk matrix.

Figure:-2 Blasting Activity

Table-1 Hazards in tunnelling and preventive measures

Tunnel work activities	Hazards	Preventive measures
Drilling and Blasting	Noise pollution, vibration damage, flying debris, injuries from explosives, exposure to hazardous materials	Use noise-reducing equipment, monitor vibration levels, implement safety measures for blasting operations, and wear protective gear.
Blasting	Fly rock and air shock	Keep away from area, ensure good ventilation in work area
	Toxic fumes	Switch on ventilation at full capacity after blasting
Ventilation	Inadequate air quality, exposure to harmful gases	Daily monitoring of air quality, Implement effective ventilation systems, monitor air quality by third party periodically, and provide respiratory protection.
Excavation	Rockfalls, cave-ins, flooding, gas leaks, exposure to hazardous materials	Use appropriate excavation methodology, implement ground control measures, provide drainage systems, test for gases, and wear protective gear. Entry prohibited for unauthorised personnel
Excavated material transfer	Being struck or crushed, Falling Material Tripping and falling	Do not enter into loading area Keep running surface in good condition Good lighting to work area
Scaling for loose rock	Rock fall Collapse as result from instability of exposed rock surface, serious injury to workmen /staff	Use machine for rock scaling Do not enter danger zone before scaling is completed Use of job specific appropriate and mandatory PPE's during scaling
Installing Rock Bolts	Falling from heights Noise Equipment related accidents	Use working platforms Use eye and hearing protection Do not get too close to rotating equipment and machines
Shotcreting by machine	Falling from heights Chemical additives Dust	Use men working baskets, Use protective clothing Wear respiratory protection, eye protection
Installing support and mesh	Falling rock and support	Not working under unsupported areas
Construction Equipment	Mechanical failures, collisions, injuries from moving equipment	Conduct regular maintenance, implement safety procedures for equipment operation, and provide operator training.

Findings

The study revealed several key hazards associated with tunnelling activities:

- **Hazardous Gases:** Methane, carbon monoxide, and other toxic gases can accumulate in tunnels, posing a serious health risk to workers.
- **Tunnel Collapse/ Roof Collapse:** Tunnel roofs can be unstable, leading to cave-ins, serious injury and fatalities. It is very important to identify the hazards and risk in routine & non-routine activities during inspection for safety, geological, quality aspects. All activities should

be involved PLAN-DO- CHECK-ACT method to perform & safely complete the task.

- **Equipment Failures:** Mechanical breakdowns in the equipment's/ vehicles and improper equipment usage can result in accidents. Regular inspection and fitness of the equipment's & vehicles by the experts to avoid failures / break downs.
- **Explosive Materials:** The handling, transportation and uses of explosives in tunnelling operations require strict safety protocols.
- **Hoisting Accidents:** Lifting heavy equipment and materials can pose risks if not performed correctly.
- **Human Error:** Negligence, lack of training, and fatigue can contribute to accidents. Workforce must be medical / physically fit to perform work. Close monitoring /inspection of worksite. Job specific Training & refreshment training should be imparted by competent trainer.

III. ENHANCING TUNNEL SAFETY THROUGH PROACTIVE MEASURES

Tunnel safety is a critical concern in the construction and maintenance of underground infrastructure. Proactive approaches can help identify and mitigate potential hazards, ensuring the safety of workers, users, and surrounding communities.

"Proactive Measures"

Advanced Technologies: Leverage technologies like sensors, monitoring systems, and data analytics to detect potential hazards and optimize safety measures.

Risk Assessment and Management: Identify potential hazards and develop strategies to mitigate or eliminate them.

Regular Maintenance and Inspection: Implement scheduled maintenance and inspection programs to detect and address issues before they become major problems.

Worker Training and Awareness: Provide regular training and awareness programs for workers to recognize and respond to potential hazards.

Proactive Safety Observation Program (PSOP)- This programme is designed for identify the safety observation at workplace during roster round. PSOP team constituted at project site from Project Senior Management. They inspect the worksite and identify observations & communicated to concerned departments, same observations uploaded on online portal for compliance & close out within the given target dates.

Emergency Preparedness and Response: Develop and regularly practice emergency response plans to ensure readiness in case of incidents.

Collaboration and Communication: Foster open communication and collaboration among stakeholders, including workers, management, and regulatory agencies.

Continuous Improvement: Encourage a culture of continuous improvement, learning from incidents and near misses to enhance safety measures.

"Benefits:"

- Reduced Accidents and Injuries
- Improved Worker Safety and Well-being
- Enhanced Reputation and Public Trust
- Increased Efficiency and Productivity
- Cost Savings through Reduced Downtime and Claims.

Proactive approaches to tunnel safety are essential for ensuring the protection of workers, users, and surrounding communities. By implementing these measures, stakeholders can significantly enhance safety and reduce risks in tunnel construction and maintenance.

IV. AWARENESS PROGRAM & MOTIVATION AT SITES

"An Awareness Program with the Motivational program conducted at the work front in TEHRI-PSP

to motivate the workers and implement safe work culture at work sites.

"Empowering Safety Excellence":
"Boosting safety awareness and motivation to create a culture of proactive risk management, fostering a safe and healthy work environment, and encouraging every individual to take ownership of their safety and well-being."

"Safe Together":
"Raising awareness, motivating teams, and inspiring a culture of safety excellence, because every individual matters and every moment counts."

"Safety First:''
"Building a culture of awareness, motivation, and safety excellence, where every person is empowered to prioritize safety, prevent incidents, and ensure a safe and healthy work environment."

This program aims to:

- Raise safety awareness
- Motivate teams
- Encourage proactive risk management
- Foster a culture of safety excellence
- Empower individuals to prioritize safety

Figure :-3 (A) Awareness & Motivational programme

Figure :-3 (B) Awareness & Motivational programme

Figure :- 4 Safety Pledge

Challenges in the Construction of the Tehri Pumped Storage Power Project"-
The Tehri Pumped Storage Power Project (PSP), located in the Garhwal Himalayas, India, is a significant hydroelectric project. However, its construction faced several challenges due to the complex geological conditions, environmental concerns, and logistical complexities.

Geological Challenges

Seismic Activity

The project area is situated in a seismically active region, necessitating earthquake-resistant designs for the dam, powerhouses, and other structures. This added complexity and cost to the project.

Rock Instability

The hilly terrain is prone to rock slides and instability, posing risks to the dam's stability and the safety of construction workers. Extensive geological investigations and stabilization measures were required.

Groundwater Inflow

Managing groundwater inflow into the dam and tunnels was a critical challenge. Proper drainage systems and grouting techniques were necessary to prevent waterlogging and potential damage.

Environmental Concerns

Biodiversity Loss

The project involved submerging a significant area of forest land, leading to concerns about biodiversity loss. Efforts were made to mitigate these impacts through habitat creation and conservation measures.

Displacement of Communities

The construction of the project resulted in the displacement of local communities. Resettlement plans and rehabilitation programs were implemented to address the social and economic impacts.

Water Pollution

The project's operations could potentially impact water quality in downstream areas. Measures were taken to prevent and mitigate pollution, such as proper waste management and water treatment facilities.

Logistical Challenges

Remote Location

The project site is located in a remote and mountainous region, making access difficult and increasing transportation costs.

Infrastructure Development:

The construction of necessary infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and power lines, was a significant undertaking.

Labor Shortages

Recruiting and retaining skilled labor in a remote area presented challenges. Adequate housing, transportation, and amenities were required to attract and retain workers.

Additional Challenges

Cost Overruns

The project faced significant cost overruns due to factors such as geological complexities, environmental mitigation measures, and delays in construction.

Time Delays

The project experienced delays due to various factors, including geological challenges, environmental issues, and logistical constraints.

Community Resistance

There was opposition from local communities and environmental groups due to concerns about displacement, environmental impacts, and potential risks.

Overcoming these challenges required careful planning, innovative engineering solutions, and effective stakeholder engagement. The Tehri PSP project serves as a testament to the complexities and challenges associated with large-scale hydroelectric projects in challenging environments.

Figure :-5 Hazards in Tunneling

Hidden Hazards in Tunnelling

Tunnelling is a complex and often-dangerous undertaking, with various hidden hazards that can pose significant risks to workers.

These hazards can be geological, environmental, or related to the tunnelling process itself. Here are some of the most common hidden hazards in tunnelling:

Geological Hazards

- **Unstable Ground Conditions:** Unexpectedly soft or unstable ground can lead to cave-ins and collapses.
- **Hidden Faults and Fractures:** These can weaken the rock formation and increase the risk of ground failure.
- **Water Inflow:** Unexpected water inflow can cause flooding, equipment damage, and safety hazards.
- **Gas Pockets:** Pockets of harmful gases, such as methane or carbon monoxide, can pose a serious threat to workers' health and safety.

Environmental Hazards

- **Contaminated Ground:** Tunnelling through contaminated sites can expose workers to hazardous materials.
- **Wildlife Encounters:** Unexpected encounters with wildlife, such as snakes or insects, can pose a risk to workers' health.

Tunnelling Process Hazards

- **Equipment Failures:** Malfunctioning equipment can lead to accidents and injuries.
- **Explosive Hazards:** The use of explosives in tunnelling can pose a risk of accidental detonations.
- **Ventilation Issues:** Inadequate ventilation can lead to oxygen deficiency, gas accumulation, and other health hazards.
- **Noise and Vibration:** Exposure to excessive noise and vibration can cause hearing damage and other health problems.

To mitigate these risks, tunnelling projects require careful planning, proactive hazards identification and risk assessment of all activities, and the implementation of appropriate safety measures at all workplaces. These measures can include geological surveys, ground stabilization techniques, proper ventilation, and the use of protective equipment.

Significant Risks in Tunnel

Tunnel safety is a critical concern in the construction and operation of tunnels, as it poses significant risks to workers, motorists, and surrounding communities. Various risk factors contribute to tunnel safety hazards, including:

Geotechnical monitoring and Stabilization Measures

- Fire and explosion risks
- Ventilation and air quality issues
- Traffic accidents and congestion
- Emergency response challenges
- Construction and maintenance hazards
- Environmental concerns (water pollution, noise)

To Mitigate these Risks, Various Strategies have been Identified

- Geotechnical monitoring and stabilization measures
- Fire prevention and suppression systems
- Advanced ventilation systems
- Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) for traffic management
- Emergency response planning and training
- Implementing safety standards and regulations
- Regular maintenance and inspections
- Worker training and education programs
- Environmental impact assessments and mitigation measures

Figure :- 6 Routine Inspections in Tunnel

Effective tunnel safety management requires a comprehensive approach, incorporating risk assessment, mitigation strategies, and continuous monitoring and improvement

To mitigate these risks, the study recommends the following safety measures:

- **Ventilation Systems:** Ensure adequate ventilation to prevent the accumulation of hazardous gases.
- **Regular Inspections:** Conduct frequent inspections of tunnel walls, roofs, and equipment to identify potential hazards.
- **Worker Training:** Provide comprehensive training to workers on safety procedures, emergency response, and equipment usage.
- **Emergency Response Plans:** Develop and implement emergency response plans to address accidents promptly.
- **Risk Assessment:** Conduct regular risk assessments to identify potential hazards and take appropriate preventive measures.

Figure :- 7 Ventilation system in tunnelling

Measures to be taken to avoid incident inside the tunnel:

- Implementing advanced ventilation systems to monitor and control air quality
- Installing automated fire detection and suppression systems.
- Conducting regular structural inspections and maintenance.
- Enhancing emergency response plans and conducting regular drills
- Implementing advanced technologies like sensors, IoT devices, and data analytics to monitor tunnel conditions.
- Improving communication systems for real-time information sharing
- Enhancing safety training for personnel and emergency responders.
- Implementing traffic management systems to reduce congestion and hazards
- Installing advanced lighting and visibility systems
- Developing and implementing advanced emergency evacuation systems.

Some other measures that can be taken include:

- Regularly updating and enforcing safety protocols
- Conducting risk assessments and hazard analysis
- Implementing safety culture programs
- Using advanced materials and technologies for tunnel construction and maintenance
- Improving incident reporting and investigation processes

Figure :-8 Regular Monitoring in Tunnel

It is important to bring to your noticed that tunnel safety is a continuous process, requires regular review, and updates to ensure the safety of all users.

V. CONCLUSION

Tunnelling operations can be made safer through a combination of engineering controls, administrative measures, and adequately use of personal protective equipment. By implementing the recommended safety measures, organizations can significantly reduce the risk of accidents and create a safer working environment for tunnel workers.

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Rajeev Prasad, Chief Geologist, Hindustan Construction Company Limited. Received M Tech. in Applied Geology from IIT Roorkee in 1989 and has over 33 years of multidisciplinary experience in managing of small to mega construction projects at various positions and locations in India.

Kailash Thakur, Manager(Safety), Hindustan Construction Company Limited. Recieved Diploma in Fire Engineering & Safety Management form Visvesvaraya Collage of Fire Engineering & Safety Management in 2007 and has over 20 years of experience in HSE at various locations in India.

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