

Adapting drones for underground service

We've seen the development of drones for all sorts of applications above the ground, but they could be pretty nifty below the ground too.

In many instances, exploring or inspecting deep-level mines, particularly those believed to be unsafe, can put human life at risk. But according to Fred Cawood, director of the Mining Institute at Wits, drones are being developed to send to danger zones beneath the surface.



South Africa has some of the deepest and most dangerous mines in the world and safety is a huge concern for mining companies and the government.

He says there is a drone prototype under development, equipped with video cameras, which measured 40cm across and could be operated from a control room on the surface.

Drones could be used to inspect the stope area after blasting is done to ensure it is safe to resume work or to see if it is safe to send rescue teams in after a disaster.

Cawood said he had a request for funding to commercialise the drone technology with South Africa's Mine Health and Safety Council.

Mining deaths in South Africa fell for eight consecutive years, hitting a record low of 77 in 2015, but a spike in deaths this year has raised red flags.

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