

Dispatching Innovation: Suncor's New Dispatch System Improves Mine Operations

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We're using automation to increase the efficiency of our mine dispatch system. Kriste McCann is one of the dispatchers at our Mildred Lake site benefitting from this technology. She says it has seen great success at the site and is helping to free up dispatchers' time to focus on optimal routes for the mining trucks. The innovative process is one of the ways we continue to harness technology to improve the reliability and productivity performance of our operations.

Now working as a mine dispatcher, Kriste says a new dispatch system is resulting in big improvements to one of Mildred Lake's key business units.

"Looking back over my time here, I can see how much easier this system could have made things at the mine," says Kriste. "It's incredible to see the impacts it has made in such a short time. It's a powerful thing to be a part of."

The role of a mine dispatcher includes the primary responsibility of making sure the heavy haul trucks are going to the right mining shovels at the right time.

Nicknamed by those on site as "dynamic dispatch", the new system was recently implemented at Mildred Lake and is already seeing significant enhancements to the existing process using innovative technology. Human dispatchers, like Kriste, still work around the clock, but the artificial intelligence (AI)-system handles the simpler tasks such as: assigning trucks to dump stations, directing trucks to refueling stations and automatically redirecting trucks to avoid work slowdowns. Although these tasks are defined as simple to dispatchers, it's crucial to understand dispatch crews are the base level of what keeps Suncor's mines running 24/7.

With the AI-system assigning the trucks, it allows dispatchers to take a step back, look at maps of the routes running in the mine and find ways to optimize them for the smoothest operation possible. This leads to improved routes for the mining trucks and improved mining blends. Mining blends are specific blends of various ores made to provide steady and predictable feeds into production plants. Optimal blends also help to avoid any work upsets in the plant and increases the amount of oil sand moved per minute. The more material the trucks can safely move per minute, the higher the revenue for the mine.

Kriste believes this is just the beginning of the upgrades this new system brings and is hearing positive feedback from the equipment operators as well.

"I'm definitely looking forward to the future with this technology," adds Kriste. "Being offered the opportunity to work on and use the system as efficiently as we can gives endless opportunities for dispatchers at Mildred Lake."

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Contact Info:

Spokesperson: Suncor Energy

Website: <https://www.3blmedia.com/profiles/suncor-energy>

Email: info@3blmedia.com

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