

Mining Accident News No.0808

Wednesday 7 May 2008

Massey subsidiary cited for 3 violations in coal accident

Massey Energy has been cited for safety violations that federal investigators say contributed to the death of a West Virginia coal miner. The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration found the violations while investigating a Dec. 4 accident at an underground Massey mine in Kanawha County. Miner David Neal fell about 39 feet when a conveyer belt he was repairing started unexpectedly. The 57-year-old died 10 days later.

Three citations outlined in an MSHA report released Wednesday say the belt had inadequate startup alarms, power wasn't disconnected before Neal started work, and the circuit breaker had a broken handle, making it inoperable.

A Massey spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Thursday 8 May 2008

Qld: Fallen miners to be commemorated

Queensland Government media release

Geoff Wilson - Minister for Mines and Energy

Townsville: Mines and Energy Minister Geoff Wilson has told an annual health and safety conference for small mines and quarries that nothing is more important than the safety and health of the men and women who work in the industry.

Minister Wilson said while the mining and quarrying industry continues to power the state, the highest safety standards must continue to be enforced from the ground up – mine by mine, employer by employer, worker by worker.

"Queensland has one of the best mine safety records in the world and the best mine safety legislation in Australia. It's in everyone's best interests to keep it that way," Mr Wilson said.

"The State Government has taken a number of significant steps to improve safety and health in the mining and quarrying industry. But we can't do it alone. Those responsible for safety must fully play their part," he said.

The Minister said the industry was looking at new ways to avoid on-site collisions by using computer simulations to help train people to operate machinery safely.

"They're also working with equipment manufacturers to fast track the development of safer designs for earthmoving equipment," he said.

"Queensland has also begun a joint study with a major US university into how changing human behaviour could help prevent accidents in the mining and quarrying industries," he said.

Minister Wilson said the State Government would hold a Miners Memorial Day to commemorate the lives of more than 1450 miners who died in mining and quarrying tragedies that touch on three different centuries of mining in Queensland.

Miners Memorial Day will be held on the anniversary of the worst mining disaster in Queensland's history. On the 19th September, 1921, 75 miners lost their lives in a coal dust explosion at Mount Mulligan in far north Queensland.

"Mining has helped forge our strong economy. From the gold rush days of the 1800s, mining has become a multi-billion dollar industry that is powering the state.

'And while we enjoy the benefits of the resources boom, we should reflect on how we got here and at what price – that's what Miners Memorial Day is all about," Mr Wilson said.

Saturday 10 May 2008

In impoverished Central Asian valley, coal mining is a perilous life

KYZYL-KIYA, Kyrgyzstan - In the impoverished Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, illegal coal mining is a dirty, dangerous part of the underground economy.

After the huge Soviet mines in the region closed in the 1990s, jobless men and boys started their own small operations, using picks and shovels to claw coal out of the mountains. Some are as young as 11, miners say.



A coal miner outside an illegal mine in southern Kyrgyzstan, Kok-Jana.

Today, hundreds - perhaps thousands - of miners earn an average they say of about US\$50 (euro32) a week in the mines. They haul the coal out one 150-pound sack at a time, and sell them in markets for about US\$3 (euro1.80) each.

"We work for bread," shrugged Ibrahim Almahayev, 43, nearly naked, whose face was smeared with coal dust.



Coal miners in southern Kyrgyzstan prepare their gear for a 12-hour shift in an illegal mine.

Methane seeps into the hot, narrow mines. When a tunnel collapses, miners say, there is little hope for rescue. But miners feel they don't have much choice. "We go down there because there are no jobs up here," said Abdul Abulkasimov, 54.

Tuesday 13 May 2008

State mine safety chief needs more time for mine seal tests

State officials expect to miss a deadline next week to report to Gov. Joe Manchin about the adequacy of West Virginia's new rules governing underground coal-mine seals.

Ronald Wooten, director of the state Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training, said his agency needs more time to test alternative ways to make seals explosion proof.

"We're not going to make our deadline to make recommendations to the governor," Wooten said Monday. "We're continuing to study the issue. We'll have recommendations later in the summer."

Since the Sago Mine disaster in January 2006, state and federal regulators have been mulling various proposals to toughen underground mine seal requirements.

In March 2007, lawmakers passed new seal construction requirements for West Virginia's coal industry. Last month, the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration finalized its new federal seal rules, as required by Congress in the 2006 MINER Act.

Under state law, issuance of the final MSHA rule gave Wooten 30 days to report to Manchin about whether more state changes were needed, based on the federal rule.

MSHA issued its final rule on April 18, so Wooten's report to the governor is due by Sunday.

Wooten said that he doesn't want to make those recommendations until his agency conducts a new round of explosion tests later this month.

State officials are exploring the option for mine operators to pile up mining debris and additional material - probably blasted away from the mine roof - just inside underground seals. This technique is called "explosion wave mitigation." Basically, the wall of rock and dirt would be expected to absorb an explosion and help protect the seals.

During a public comment period last year, Wooten urged MSHA to consider allowing this technique in its final nationwide rule.

MSHA declined. Agency officials said that these methods "may not provide effective protection" for miners, especially when an explosion causes a series of blast waves to move through the mine.

"Most wave mitigation techniques are designed for a one-time use, after which they do not offer any quantifiable resistance to explosion overpressure," MSHA said in its final rule.

"While wave mitigation methods are not discouraged by MSHA, wave mitigation alone cannot be used to meet the requirements of the standard."

But Wooten said Monday that MSHA considered only techniques that used bags of rock dust or water as explosion wave mitigation, not the "shields" of mine debris the state wants to test.

So far, Wooten said, computer modelling has shown that the state's proposed method could reduce blast forces from more than 600 pounds per square inch to between 100 and 140 pounds per square inch before a blast hits the underground seals.

Mine seals are widespread, with estimates ranging into the thousands at hundreds of mines across the coalfields.

Throughout the 1990s, regulators said and did little about them, despite a series of lightning-induced explosions in sealed areas of mines in Alabama and West Virginia.

Saturday 17 May 2008

Pennsylvania, USA: Roof collapse in Emerald Mine to slow down coal production

WAYNESBURG, Pa. - Coal production is expected to slow down after a small section of roof collapsed in a Greene County mine.

No one was injured in last weekend's roof collapse. The collapse was in the Emerald Mine, just south of Waynesburg.

State Department of Environmental Protection spokesman Tom Rathbun says the piece of roof fell on a stage loader, a piece of equipment that moves coal to a conveyor belt.

A spokesman for Foundation Coal Holdings, Rick Nida, says the problem is not unusual. He says the miners could see the problem developing and knew to stay away. The Maryland-based company owns the mine. Nida says the collapse will slow down production.

Thursday 22 May 2008

Tasmanian mine safety under review

This is a media release issued by the Tasmanian Minister for Planning and Workplace Relations

The Minister for Planning and Workplace Relations, David Bartlett, says the findings into the deaths of three Renison miners are a tragic reminder of the dangers of underground mining.

"While it is premature to provide a full response to the 109 page report, there is no doubt that the current laws that regulate mine safety in Tasmania need reviewing," Mr Bartlett said.

Mr Bartlett said to that end, a workshop on the future regulation of mine safety for Tasmania was held in Hobart in March.

The workshop was chaired by Professor Andrew Hopkins, an authority on mine safety.

"The workshop comprised prominent academics, mine managers, union leaders and

regulators, and drew from a range of regulatory options for a model which best fits Tasmania's needs," Mr Bartlett said.

Tasmania is also participating in a national steering committee which is considering a nationally uniform regulatory framework.

"But rather than wait for the final report from the national steering committee, we will work towards a model which best fits Tasmania's needs," Mr Bartlett said.

"Workplace Standards Tasmania will form and chair its own steering group with stakeholders to examine proposals in more detail.

"A project manager has commenced with Workplace Standards Tasmania to assist in the process.

"Coroner Jones' findings will also be used to inform the steering group."

Mr Bartlett said audits of all underground metalliferous mines were completed last year and mine audit activity by Workplace Standards Tasmania continued.

"Mines inspectors have been spending more time visiting mines in the past year than previously.

"Their increased presence has been welcomed by both managers and mine workers.

"None of this however, takes away from the need for all people working in mines to remain vigilant.

"The Government wishes to again express deep condolences to the families of Jarrod Jones, Matthew Lister and Sid Pearce."

Friday 23 May 2008

Ukraine mine coal burst kills 4, 7 missing

KIEV, Ukraine – Ukrainian officials say four coal miners are dead and seven missing after an explosion at a mine in the Donetsk region.

Maryna Nikitina, a spokeswoman for the industrial safety watchdog agency, said Friday

that the explosion of methane gas and coal took place overnight about 2,800 feet underground.

There were about 400 miners were underground at the time and 14 were in the immediate area of the blast. Three miners walked out and are hospitalized.

Ukraine has some of the world's most dangerous mines, due to outdated equipment and poor safety standards. Since the 1991 Soviet collapse, nearly 4,300 miners have been killed in accidents. Officials say that for every 1 million tons of coal brought to the surface in Ukraine, three miners lose their lives.

Sunday 25 May 2008

Chinese rescuers rush to reach 24 coal miners trapped by May 12 earthquake.

YINGXIU, China — The death toll from a massive earthquake two weeks ago could take a major leap and pass 80,000, Chinese officials said Saturday, suggesting the government might be giving up hope of finding more survivors.

But rescuers rushed to reach 24 coal miners who officials said were trapped in three mines by the disaster, though it wasn't known if the miners were still alive.

"We have had the miracle in the past that a miner was found alive after being trapped underground for 21 days," Wang Dexue, deputy chief of the government's work safety department, said during a news conference in Beijing. "We are carrying out rescue work on the assumption that they are still alive. We absolutely will not give up."

Wang gave no further details on the trapped miners. China's mines are among the world's deadliest, with explosions, cave-ins and floods killing nearly 3,800 people last year.

Friday 30 May 2008

Six workers trapped in Russian coal mine

NEW YORK—Mechel OAO, a Russian mining company, said six workers remained trapped Friday in a southwestern Siberia coal mine.

The accident at Mechel's Southern Kuzbass OAO coal unit's Lenin Mine occurred while workers were installing ceiling support sections.

A collapse trapped eight miners, two of which were injured and have been rescued. Rescue workers were seeking to bring out the six other workers

Saturday 31 May 2008

Teen Killed at Barbour County Coal Mine

Authorities are investigating a fatal accident at a Barbour County coal mine. The Office of Mine Safety, Health and Training says an 18 year old "red hat trainee" died when a mine scoop ran over him. He had only been working at the mine for about five weeks. It happened at about 2:35 Friday afternoon, at the WolfRun Sentinel Mine, in Philippi. The mine is owned by International Coal Group. State inspectors have arrived at the mine. Authorities have not released the victim's name.

Sunday 1 June 2008

Up to 3 injured in crane accident at Wyoming coal mine

CHEYENNE, Wyo. Three people were injured Saturday when a large crane collapsed as it moved a pipe across a rail line at the Black Thunder coal mine in northeast Wyoming, government officials said.

Bill Denning, spokesman for the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration in Denver, said federal inspectors were on their way to the coal mine, about 180 miles north of Cheyenne.

Denning said there were no reports of any deaths in the accident. He said the mine will be

shut down while agency officials conduct an investigation.

Bruce Stemp, director of safety for crane company Lampson International in Washington State, said his company's crane was involved. He said company representatives were on their way to the scene.

"At this point, all I can do is confirm that there was an accident up there with the crane, and that is all the information we have," Stemp said.

The Black Thunder mine is in the Powder River Basin, the nation's most productive coal basin. Attempts to reach officials with the Thunder Basin Coal Company, which operates the mine, were not successful Saturday afternoon. Phone messages left for Thunder Basin's parent company, St. Louis-based Arch Coal Inc., were not immediately returned.

Campbell County Sheriff's Deputy C.T. Akers, a resident of the nearby town of Wright, said he arrived at the scene of the accident about 15 minutes after the department was notified of the collapse.

"For some reason - at this point I have no idea why - something happened and the crane collapsed, dropped the crane, and of course the pipe," Akers said.

"It's completely toppled over; it's a mass of blue, twisted metal," Akers said. "My guess would be that they might be able to salvage the power unit and the tracks, and things like that. But the gantry, that's going to be scrap metal, would be my guess."

Akers said he didn't see the three people reportedly injured in the accident. He said one was transported to a hospital by helicopter, while the two others were taken by ambulance.

"I know that two of the individuals were described as very critical," Akers said.

Truman Cavender, a security officer at the mine 12 miles east of Wright, said he was ordered to call for ambulances early Saturday afternoon. He said the accident occurred at a new

construction site, about seven miles from the mine headquarters.

One patient from the accident was transported to the Wyoming Medical Center in Casper, said nursing supervisor Mike Chambers. Chambers would not release any information on the person's identity or the severity of injuries.

Debbie Rhoades, a nursing supervisor at Campbell County Memorial Hospital in Gillette, said the hospital was expecting to receive a couple of patients from the crane collapse. She said she didn't know how serious their injuries were.

The crane was moving a 260-foot section of conveyor tube over the railroad when the accident occurred, said Gus Melonas, spokesman for Fort Worth, Texas-based BNSF Railway. He said a 70-foot section of the tubing was blocking the main line after the accident. Material and debris were also blocking a connection off the main line that serves the Black Thunder and Jacob Ranch mines.

Railroad crews had reopened lines by Saturday night, said Melonas, who is based in Seattle.

Melonas said the crane was being used to construct a conveyor pipe system to move coal from the mine to freight cars.

The Casper Star-Tribune reported in April that construction and crane crews were moving a 2.7 million-pound crane, described as one of the largest in the world, into place for the project.

"This type of crane is capable of handling more tonnage than any type of crane in the world," Melonas said.



Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

H

hammer and tap A rock-drilling process in which one man holds a steel drill and rotates it while another hammers it with a sledge hammer.

haulage Any system whereby skips are propelled along an inclined tramway by means of a rope. Particularly common in coal mines, where three systems are used;

- direct haulage by a drum winder, the skips returning by gravity alone;
- tail-rope, where a second rope was attached from a second winder drum to the end of a line of skips to reverse the direction of travel; and
- endless rope where a rope ran around pulleys in a continuous loop, skips being hooked on to travel around a circular track. The latter became the most common by the late 19th century. In the case of mines with inclined tunnel access, the haulage was usually extended to the surface, carrying the skips over a tippler where the coal emptied into bins or onto screens for sorting.

- Ed.