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# Mining Accident News No.0920

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## Tuesday 23 June 2009

### **WA: Kambalda mine death inquest begins**

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

A coronial inquest has begun into the death of a mine worker at Kambalda in southern central Western Australia.

Andrew John Morton was working at Consolidated Minerals' Beta Hunt nickel mine in 2006 when he was crushed in a rockfall.

The mine's underground manager, Michael John Aspinall, yesterday told the court there was nothing to indicate the area in which Mr Morton died was unstable.

However, Mr Aspinall said the number of rock bolts supporting the area was at least one fewer than required by minimum standards.

The inquest continues today.

## Wednesday 24 June 2009

### **Coal mine blast in Indonesia kills at least 32**

*Extract from World Socialist Web Site wsws.org*

A gas explosion at the PT Dasrat-owned Sarana Arang Sejati coal mine in the Sawahlunto district of West Sumatra on June 16 killed at least 32 people. The tragedy is the outcome of the appalling safety standards that prevail in much of the Indonesian mining industry.

The blast sent flames 50 metres into the air and left a huge crater on the surface. Rescue efforts inside the 150 metre-deep mine were hampered by rock slides and dangerous concentrations of methane and carbon dioxide.

Many bodies were pulled from narrow paths deep in the mine and were so badly burned they could not be identified. Sixteen workers were saved from the scene, but five died later in hospital. More than 40 miners were working underground at the time.

Police and disaster officials are investigating the cause of the blast. According to a report in the *Jakarta Post* on June 18, there is speculation that a short circuit in a power generator or a miner lighting a cigarette may have triggered an explosion of methane gas, which had reached dangerously high levels in the mine. In the meantime, police have sealed off the mine.

The Sarana Arang Sejati mine has a history of safety problems. The head of the Sawahlunto Mining Agency, Syafirwal, told the *Jakarta Post* that another explosion at the site in 2007 had killed three workers and the agency had recommended its closure. Instead, a licence for mining at the site was given to PT Dasrat in December 2008, which subcontracted production to the same local businessman who had previously operated the pit. The mine produced about

1,500 tons of coal a month, supplying local paper and power companies.

The mayor of Sawahlunto, Amran Nur, claimed that he had advised the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources in December about the risks of a methane explosion at the mine, but the warning was ignored. "They did not listen to us," he said. "They kept on sending miners to the site."

Ultimately, the only action taken by the local government was to send a letter to PT Dasrat asking that it install additional ventilation in the mine shafts. "But we didn't know whether they had abided by it or not. We didn't check it again," Amran admitted.

Priagun Rahmanto, an analyst from the Reforminer Institute, told the *Jakarta Globe* that had proper safety measures been taken, the disaster could have been prevented. "The owners should be the main party responsible for the accident. The blast must have happened because there were incorrect procedures and safety measures in place," he said.

If one changed the Indonesian names and places, the tragedy in Sawahlunto could be yet another of the accidents in China's coal mining industry that kill thousands of workers every year. Disregard for safety measures, poverty wages and corrupt government officials who collude with mine owners are the social conditions that produce the deadly disasters. Indonesia does not have the same death toll as China only because most mines in the country are open-cut, rather than underground operations.

The Sawahlunto coal fields are rich in reserves and have been worked since 1892. The burgeoning global demand for coal, however, particularly from China, has led to a vast expansion of mining. Indonesia is now the world's second largest coal exporter after Australia, with a projected output of 230 million tonnes this year, more than

double the 100 million tonnes produced in 2002.

Miners today have to dig far deeper to access high-grade coal, creating greater dangers from lethal concentrations of methane gas and unstable mine structures. Moreover, the prospect of lucrative profits, however short-term, has seen large numbers of small and often illegal operations started up.

### Quote of the week

**Before you act consider, when you have considered, tis fully time to act.**

**Gaius Sallustius Crispus (Sallust),  
Roman historian (86-34 BC)**

The Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program (RMAP) web site at the Australian National University published a short report last year titled, "Illegal Mining in Indonesia". It estimated that there were approximately 77,000 illegal mines in the country, employing 465,000 workers in diverse industries such as tin, gold, diamond and coal. The report noted that Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics recorded the average number employed in the informal mining sector in 1997-2002 to be 324,000—about 10 times higher than the 34,000 workers employed in the formal sector. The "informal" miners are poorly paid and approximately 10 percent are children under 17 years of age.

The conditions in the illegal mines are shocking. The RMAP cited the example of gold miners in Kalimantan, who "never use diving equipment or protect their bodies with wire while diving in the bottom of river; rarely use gloves and allow their skin to contact directly with hazardous mercury and often inhale it; never use ear caps despite 6-8 hours non-stop of heavily vibrated mechanical sounds; never use boots or appropriate clothing to protect their bodies while they are submerging in the water river; never filter the water they drink from the

river—which is in fact contaminated by mercury; and prefer to see a traditional healer (dukun) to cure them when they are sick rather than a doctor”.

RMAP pointed to the likely relationship between major corporate concerns and the small illegal mining operations. The report suggested that many of the local businessmen who hired poverty-stricken farmers, fishermen and the unemployed to work in mines functioned as intermediaries for larger investors, including foreign companies.

Referring to the illegal mining of close to 30 million tonnes of coal in South Kalimantan between 2001 and 2003, RMAP wrote: “It is most unlikely that, given the national income per capita of \$US725, locals were able to self finance billions of rupiah worth of mining operations—with trucks, excavators, 20HP machineries, smelters, or even ships. Along the coasts of Batulicin, Tanah Laut, and Tanah Bumbu, there lay illegal stockpiles and ports where barges are waiting to ship coal to investors’ destinations, mainly to China and India.” In regions like West Papua, the Indonesian military directly controls the illegal gold mining operations and reaps significant profits from them.

Following the explosion, the Sawahlunto authorities belatedly ordered a halt to mining at 12 other coal mines in the region, which employ some 1,000 workers. “Company operations have been temporarily closed until they comply with proper mining procedures and ensure the safety of miners,” mayor Amran told the *Jakarta Post*.

The production halt, however, is unlikely to last for long. Government officials and businesses are calling for mining to resume as quickly as possible in order to guarantee coal supplies to the local power plant. Moreover, authorities in Indonesia view mining—both legal and illegal—as an important source of revenue, whether in the

form of taxes or kickbacks. The least important concern in deciding when production will restart is the safety and lives of miners.

### Ten worst coal mine disasters

Dead	Place, Year
1549	<u>Benxihu Colliery</u> explosion China, 1942
1099	Coal mine explosion Courrières, France, 1903
687	Coal mine explosion Mitsubishi Hojyo, Kyūshū, Japan 15 December 1914
472	Coal mine Wankie, Rhodesia, 1972
458	Coal mine Mitsui Miike, Omuta, Kyūshū, Japan 9 November, 1963
439	<u>Senghenydd Colliery Disaster</u> Senghenydd, Wales, 1913
437	Coal mine Coalbrook, South Africa, 1960
422	Coal mine New Yubari, Yubari, Hokkaidō, Japan, 28 November 1914
405	Coal mine Bergkamen, West Germany, 1946
376	Coal mine Onoura, Kirino, Kyūshū, Japan 21 December 1917

### USA: Coal miner killed by falling rock in western Pa.

*Extract from Associated Press, USA*

WIND RIDGE, Pa. - A coal miner is dead after being hit by falling rock inside a mine in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Consol Energy officials say 54-year-old Robert Maust of Uniontown died early Wednesday morning after being struck by falling rocks.

Consol spokesman Joseph Cerenzia says the accident happened around 11pm Tuesday at the Bailey Mine in Wind Ridge, about 50 miles southwest of Pittsburgh.

Cerenzia says Maust was struck in the torso. Fellow miners attended to him immediately and performed CPR while taking him out of the mine. Maust was airlifted from the scene and pronounced

dead at 12:17am. No other miners were injured.

State and federal mining officials are investigating the incident.

Thursday 25 June 2009

## USA: Panel considers fines against Quecreek Mine

*Extract from Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Nearly seven years since the rescue of nine trapped coal miners in Pennsylvania's Quecreek Mine captivated the nation, the legal wrangling over the incident continues.

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission will hear arguments Thursday about whether a judge last fall fairly assessed \$110,000 in fines against two companies, PBS Coals Inc. and Musser Engineering Inc., cited for negligence in the 2002 accident. The companies are challenging the fines.

A federal safety panel had previously recommended lesser fines of \$5,000 against each company.

The miners became trapped in a flooded tunnel July 24, 2002, after digging into an adjacent mine full of water. They had relied on outdated maps showing the mine was 300 feet away.

The miners were pulled from the ground in a dramatic rescue 77 hours later, after several of them had scrawled emotional goodbye notes to loved ones. The Quecreek Mine is in Somerset, Pa., about 50 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

In November 2008, Administrative Law Judge Robert Lesnick fined each of the companies \$55,000, saying they should've had better maps. Lesnick said the companies played "Russian roulette" with the lives of the miners and exhibited a "very high level of negligence."

Musser was hired to help prepare maps that were used to determine where to mine at PBS Coals' Quecreek Mine.

Lesnick found that the companies "knowingly mapped the Quecreek No. 1 Mine based on questionable information, knowingly placed their production agenda ahead of caution, and then directed their miners into areas that tragically turn out to be 'undiscovered country.'"

In levying the fines, Lesnick rejected a recommendation from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration that the companies each be fined \$5,000.

In August 2003, the safety administration blamed the accident on inaccurate mine maps and said the companies could have done more to ensure the miners' safety. The safety administration had suggested PBS Coals and Musser Engineering were moderately negligent, but Lesnick found both companies "grossly negligent."

Eight of the nine trapped miners reached undisclosed settlements with companies involved in the accident. A ninth miner didn't sue.

On the Net: Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission: <http://www.fmshrc.gov/>

## This week in mining accident history

Date Mine / Country (Aust unless stated)
<b>30 June 1906</b> <b>Woodhouse Pit, Shropshire, England, UK</b> <b>Underground coal mine</b> Source: <i>Wellington Journal &amp; Shrewsbury News</i>
Incident
A shocking and fatal accident occurred to a miner named <b>James William Clift</b> , employed in the <b>Woodhouse Pit</b> , St. George's, near Wellington, last Week, and on Monday <b>Mr. Coroner Lauder</b> investigated the circumstances attending the poor fellow's death. <b>Joseph Clay</b> , a fireman, said deceased was working in stall No. 60. Witness examined the stall before deceased commenced to work, and as far as he could see there was nothing wrong.

He spoke to deceased after the accident, and deceased said he was getting a few coals when it fell on him. He examined the place after the accident, and found that about a ton of coal had fallen. The accident occurred in the airway. The place was properly supported in accordance with the regulations. He could not account for the fall of coal. Deceased had no right to fetch the coal from the airway, and should not have been there. He found a dresser there; deceased would not require a dresser to get the loose coal out. By finding the dresser there he thought deceased had been "pulling" the coal. He had no business to do that, and there was no necessity for deceased to fetch the coal from the airway.

**Harry Ferriday** stated that he was working with deceased. He had not been working half-an-hour when he heard him call out, "Oh dear, pull me out". He went to deceased, and found him in the airway buried up to his waist. The roof had fallen in, and about a ton had come down. They were not sent to work in the airway. From the Saturday till the Tuesday morning a quantity of coal had fallen, and deceased went to get it out.

**Dr. Johnson** stated that he attended deceased, and found him suffering from severe injuries to his back. Death was the result of the accident.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death".

The remains of the unfortunate man were on Tuesday interred in the Parish Church-yard, Dawley. The funeral was largely attended, as the deceased was much esteemed. He leaves a widow and a large family, for whom the greatest sympathy is felt.

Saturday 27 June 2009

## Seven workers die in accident in northern India

*Extract from monsters & critics*

New Delhi - At least seven workers involved in sand mining near a river in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state were killed when the river bank caved in on Saturday, a news report said.

The incident occurred in a village in the Bijnor district, 350 kilometres north-west of the state capital of Lucknow, where a group of workers were mining along the Ratnam river, the IANS news agency reported.

Police were able to rescue three workers, district police chief Raj Kumar told IANS. The bodies of the workers were recovered from the river bank on Saturday evening.

The police launched an investigation into the tragedy. 'We have initiated an inquiry to know whether the mining along the river was sanctioned by the authorities or it was illegal,' said Kumar.

Monday 29 June 2009

## Three die in Kazakhstan coal mine collapse

*Extract from Reuters India, Mumbai, India*

ALMATY, - Three people died and one was seriously injured when part of a coal mine operated by steel giant ArcelorMittal collapsed in Kazakhstan, the company said on Monday.

The collapse at the Tentekskaya mine in the Karaganda region in central Kazakhstan on Sunday also left one miner seriously injured, the company said in a statement.

ArcelorMittal, which operates a steel plant in Kazakhstan, also runs several mines to provide it with coking coal.

Production at the mine has been halted but will likely restart by the end of the day, ArcelorMittal spokesman Nikolai Kubrakov said by telephone from Temirtau where the company's steel plant is based.

## Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

### R

**rock-breaker** A machine for crushing large pieces of ore before more refined crushing occurred. Three types were built; one consisting of a fixed and reciprocating jaw set on an angle so as to progressively reduce the rock to a smaller size (*Blake* type), the second type had rollers instead of jaws, and the third was conical with a gyrating conical muller inside it. Also called 'stone breakers' and 'jaw crushers'.



- Ed.