



# Mining Accident News No.1001

1 to 15 January 2010

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Friday 1 January 2010

## US mine deaths hit record low of 34 in 2009

*Extract from The Washington Post, USA*

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- The number of miners killed on the job in the United States fell for a second straight year to 34, the fewest since officials began keeping records nearly a century ago.

That was down from the previous low of 52 in 2008.

U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration documents show 18 of the deaths occurred in

coal mines, down from 29 in 2008; and 16 were in gold, copper and other types of mines, down from 22 in 2008. Most involved aboveground truck accidents on mine property, though some of the deaths resulted from rock falls and being struck by machinery.

Obama administration mine safety czar Joe Main said the numbers are encouraging, but he won't be satisfied until no miners are killed on the job.

"I think that's accomplishable, if you look at where we came from, and where we've come to," Main said.

The latest statistics are vastly improved, he said, from a century ago when hundreds, sometimes thousands of miners were killed each year.

The deadliest year in recorded U.S. coal mining history was 1907, when 3,242 deaths were reported. That year, the nation's most deadly mine explosion killed 358 people near Monongah, W.Va.

Main credits the decrease in deaths over the past year to beefed-up enforcement and stricter regulations in the wake of a series of mining disasters over the past four years in Kentucky, Utah and West Virginia.

In 2006, 73 miners were killed, including 12 who died in a methane explosion at the Sago Mine in West Virginia and five who died in a similar explosion at the Darby Mine in Kentucky. In 2007, 67 miners died, including six who were killed in the collapse of the Crandall Canyon mine in Utah.

Coal states reacted by revamping their mine safety laws, and Congress toughened federal rules that brought a variety of advances. Among the improvements are caches of oxygen stashed in underground mines in case miners are trapped, refuge chambers to provide shelter in emergencies, and a communications system

**NOTE:** Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of Industry & Investment NSW.

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to allow underground miners to talk with colleagues on the surface.

Steve Earle, United Mine Workers of America international vice president for the Midwest, said while those were important improvements, getting inspectors into the field is the key.

"I can say without reservation that the safest day coal miners have is when inspectors are in the mines," he said. "The more we can put our inspectors in the mines, the safer those mines will become and the closer we will come to zero fatalities."

Mine safety advocate Tony Oppegard, who has successfully lobbied to triple the number mine inspections conducted in Kentucky, said mining remains a dangerous occupation.

"Everyone who's involved in mine safety has to be extremely vigilant," he said. "There's very small margin for error in coal mining. The smallest mistake can cost a miner his life."

Kentucky led the nation in mining deaths last year with six in coal mines and one in a limestone quarry. That was followed by West Virginia and Alabama, each of which had three coal miners killed.

Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Texas each had two miners killed in coal, salt, alumina, zinc or sand and gravel operations. Arizona, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio and Puerto Rico had one miner killed in either clay, copper, gold, lime or sand and gravel operations.

"It's never positive when you have numbers like that, but it could have been worse," said David Moss, spokesman for the Kentucky Coal Association. "We're always striving for that goal of zero. That's what we work toward every single day."

Main credited cooperation between regulatory agencies, coal companies and miners with making mines safer, which led the decrease in workplace deaths.

"It is historic," he said. "And it does tell us we can achieve a point in time when we have no fatalities."

## China to execute mine explosives maker

*Extract from Ninemsn, Aus*

A Chinese explosives maker has been sentenced to death for supplying an illegal iron mine with material that ignited in the tunnels, killing 26 miners, state media says.

The official Xinhua News Agency said Gao Huailiang was sentenced on Thursday by an intermediate court in Handan, a major mining area in north China's Hebei province, for making, selling and transporting illegal explosives.

Twenty others also were given jail time for running the mine, which was hidden behind high walls and purported to be a wild boar farm, or for supplying it with homemade explosives, said the report late on Thursday. Three were sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve - a penalty that is usually commuted to life in prison.

A cache of explosives ignited in the tunnels of the covert mine in Handan's Wu'an city on February 17, 2008, killing 26 miners.

China's mining industry is the world's deadliest with most accidents blamed on poor safety as enterprises scramble to feed the country's insatiable demand for coal.

Last month, 108 miners were killed in a coal mine blast in northeast China. It was the country's deadliest mining accident in two years

Sunday 3 January 2010

## Coal mine blast kills nine in Pakistan

*Extract from Earthtimes*

Islamabad - An underground explosion in a coal mine in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province killed nine people, a media report said on Sunday. The blast ripped through a gas-filled

mine Saturday at the Marwar coalfield, located 80 kilometers from the provincial capital, Quetta.

Rescuers recovered the bodies after a search operation that continued through Saturday night, local official Farooq Ahmad was quoted as saying by the Geo News television channel.

A similar methane gas explosion in a coal mine elsewhere in the mineral-rich province left 14 miners dead and 11 others injured in March 2009.

### Quote of the week



"Where there is a will, there is a way. If there is a chance in a million that you can do something, anything, to keep what you want from ending, do it. Pry the door open or, if need be, wedge your foot in that door and keep it open."

Pauline Kael, (Film critic, USA 1919-2001)

Tuesday 5 January 2010

### USA: Mine Victim's Name Released from Signal Peak Mine accident

*Extract from KULR8.com*

BILLINGS - The Musselshell County Sheriff's Office releases the name of a Terry man who died in an accident at the Signal Peak Mine near Roundup Saturday.

Family members said 57-year old Rudy Lindstrom was killed when a truck he was working on fell off a jack and hit him in the head. Lindstrom was a mechanic at the mine south of Roundup.

The mine closed for 24-hours following the accident but has since resumed operations. Police and two federal inspectors continue to investigate.

It is the second serious accident at the mine since December 23rd. The other involved a miner who suffered broken ribs. The government cited the mine for not reporting that accident in a timely manner. A government spokesperson says there is no connection between the two accidents.

Thursday 7 January 2010

### China: 18 killed in Lisheng coal mine fire

*Extract from Xinhua, China*

Xinhua reported that a fire killed 18 and trapped 9 miners inside a coal mine in central China.

The accident took place at 2pm in Lisheng coalmine in Tanjiashan town in Hunan province, Xinhua reported.

As per report underground cables caught fire Tuesday. About 70 miners were working in the shaft at the time of the incident. 43 of them managed to escape.

Rescuers retrieved nine bodies from a mining platform in the shaft about 160 meters underground Tuesday night, while a search was on at another mining platform Wednesday.

An investigation into the cause of the accident was launched by the municipal government and Hunan provincial work safety department.

### Canada: Potash Corp., supervisor charged in death of worker at Saskatchewan mine

*Extract from The Canadian Press*

REGINA - Mining giant Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan and a company supervisor are facing charges in the death of a worker.

The provincial Ministry of Justice has laid five charges against the company and one against the supervisor under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The charges follow an investigation into the September 2008 death of Robert Tkach, 60,

who died when his vehicle crashed at a potash mine in Lanigan, Sask.

"The worker was underground and he was driving a vehicle that drove over an unguarded ledge and rolled the vehicle," said Jennifer Fabian, director of safety services with Occupational Health and Safety.

"There was no barrier there," she said.

In every case where someone gets hurt "it always comes down to an issue of ensuring that hazards are properly identified," Fabian said.

She wouldn't talk about specific details of the investigation, saying the case is before the courts.

The charges against Potash Corp. (TSX:POT) include failing to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers.

The supervisor is accused of failing "to take reasonable care to protect the health and safety of a worker who may be affected by his acts or omissions."

Potash Corp. was issued a notice of contravention after the crash. Fabian said that notice directed the company to make safety improvements at the mine. The charges laid Thursday come after the ministry reviewed the findings from the complete investigation.

Potash Corp. spokesman Bill Johnson would not comment on the charges, but added safety is "the number one priority at every one of our facilities, period."

"After this incident we co-operated fully with the mines branch and their investigation of the accident. We reviewed their recommendations and complied fully with them."

Potash Corp. and the supervisor could face fines of up to \$300,000. Individuals convicted of violating the act also face up to two years behind bars if convicted, although Fabian says no one in Saskatchewan has ever been jailed in such cases.

The only time the maximum fine has been handed out was in 1998, she added.

Potash Corp. was fined \$300,000 after pleading guilty to charges stemming from the deaths of two workers in 1996. The two men employed by a subcontractor at the company's Cory mine died after falling into a vat of boiling brine. Another man was seriously burned.

Friday 8 January 2010

## Sand slide kills 3 in Indonesia

*Extract from China View*

JAKARTA, -- Three workers were killed in a sand slide in a sand mine in Sleman of Yogyakarta in Java island on Friday, spokesman of the National Disaster Management Agency Priyadi Kardono said.

The accident occurred on Friday morning when the miners were carrying out a digging in an area which has been prohibited from mining.

"It is an accident, they violated the warning in the mine," he told Xinhua over phone.

The three were killed on the scene after a huge amount of sand and soil buried them, said Kardono.

## This week in mining accident history (1)

**30 December 1970**

**Hurricane Creek Mine, Kentucky, USA**

**Underground Coal Mine**

**Coal dust explosion**

**38 killed**

Source:

[http://www.firebaseio.com/view/en/hurricane\\_creek\\_mine\\_disaster](http://www.firebaseio.com/view/en/hurricane_creek_mine_disaster)

The **Hurricane Creek mine disaster** occurred five miles from Hyden, Kentucky on December 30, 1970, shortly after noon, and resulted in the deaths of 38 men. As was often pointed out in coverage of the disaster, it occurred a year to the day after the passage of the Coal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1969. Recovery was complicated by the fact that a foot of snow fell on the rural mountain roads at the time of the accident.

It was the most deadly mine disaster in the United States since the Farmington Mine disaster in 1968, and is the subject of Tom T. Hall's song, "Trip to Hyden".

The disaster occurred at in shafts 15 and 16 of a "truck mine" owned by Charles and Stanley Finley, which had opened the previous March on leased land, although their company had been mining in the area for ten years. The small operation involved about 170 employees, who were not members of United Mine Workers. 34 infractions had been reported in its first three months of operation, but they had been fixed, and the mine had been shut down for 3 days in June due to safety concerns.

The Bureau of Mines had declared the mine an "imminent danger" due to blasting safety hazards in November 1970 but allowed the mine to continue operation. The hazards, which included excess accumulation of coal dust and electrical spark hazards, were discovered on November 19 and ordered to be cleaned up by December 22, but the agency was short of inspectors and could not reinspect on that date, as was required by law. The understaffed agency needed about 750 inspectors, but only had 499 at the time of the disaster.

The conditions would have allowed the bureau to declare the mine "excessively hazardous" and conduct inspections every 10 days, but they chose not to do so. The mine owners had been blamed by inspectors for the crushing death of a worker on November 9, saying the owners had failed to make required repairs to the underground tractor involved in the accident.

This lack of enforcement of the new mining safety law was part of a wider problem protested by members of Congress, and union miners had gone on strike that summer to protest the lack of enforcement. The understaffed agency had, at the time of the Hurricane Creek disaster, failed to issue a single fine despite citing thousands of safety violations at dozens of coal mines.

On December 30, 1970, the 38 day shift workers entered the 36" tall mine shaft at 7 A.M. and

crawled to a depth of about 2,400 feet. The explosion occurred at about 12:10 P.M. The bodies were removed within 24 hours and the mine was sealed until an investigation could begin. A lone survivor, A.T. Collins, was reentering the shaft after a lunch break and was blown out of the mine by the explosion. Collins was one of three miners who testified that he had seen primer cord - an illegal fuse - at the mine site.

Illegal primer cord was found in the December 30 blast site, as well as at the site of a December 22 blast at the mine.

According to a memoir by James D. Ausenbaugh, who was editor of the *Courier-Journal*'s state desk at the time of the disaster, one of the mine owners complained at the mine site about the 1969 mine safety law and those who had supported it. One of the bystanders, Leslie County Judge George Wooton, confronted the owner and beat him bloody. The owner was carried from the mine site and Wooton never faced any charges.

The bodies were taken to a grade school gymnasium in Hyden. Many bodies had been so damaged in the blast that they could only be identified by social security numbers written on their belts. Most of the miners came from Clay and Leslie County counties, two of the poorest in the state, and the New York Times described their economy at the time by saying "there is little industry but coal".

The House Labor Subcommittee held a week-long inquiry into the disaster in March 1971. Chuck Finley, the mine's owner, appeared only when subpoenaed, and denied any knowledge of the illegal primer cord, including testimony from a mine worker who claimed to have told Finley about the cord a few weeks earlier. Finley also denied claims raised in earlier testimony that he had bribed a mine inspector. He was questioned most harshly by Romano L. Mazzoli of Louisville, who had just begun what would be a long career in the House of Representatives.

Saturday 9 January 2010

## Coal mine fire leaves 12 dead in east China

*Extract from Xinhua, China*

NANCHANG, -- A coal mine fire has left 12 workers dead in east China's Jiangxi Province, and police are hunting several mine executives who had fled, local authorities said Saturday.

The accident took place at about 4 p.m. Friday at the Miaoshang Coal Mine in Yushui District, in Xinyu City, the district government said in a statement.

The victims' bodies were retrieved Saturday morning, the statement said.

"An initial investigation indicates the fire was caused by short circuit of underground cables," it said.

Altogether 14 miners were working underground when the accident happened, of whom only two managed to escape, said Xu Wenpo, of the rescue headquarters, Saturday.

"The fire ignited wooden supporting structure underground, leading to the generation of harmful gases and tunnel collapse. That has added difficulties for rescue," he said.

The privately-owned coal mine, founded in 1995, reports an annual output capacity of 60,000 tonnes.

"The bank accounts of five coal mine shareholders have been frozen, and police are hunting the mine head and other executives who had fled after the accident," Xu said.

The Xinyu municipal government has ordered all mines in the city to suspend operation for safety checks, he said.

Local work safety and police are further investigating the accident, he added.

Monday 11 January 2010

## Congo Mine Collapse Kills 6, Including 5 Children

*Extract from the New York Times, USA*

KINSHASA, Congo -- A U.N. radio station says six people -- including five children -- have died in a tin mine collapse in southeast Congo.

U.N. Radio Okapi says the collapse at an abandoned mine on Sunday also left two people missing.

The radio station says the collapse also killed a woman who is survived by three children. It was unclear if any of the dead were related to each other.

Congo is awash with gold, diamonds and metals such as cassiterite and coltan used to weld small pieces together in electronics.

The sprawling country, which is the size of Western Europe, also lacks basic infrastructure like transnational roads. Many of its mines are difficult to access, making it nearly impossible to monitor for safety hazards and child labour.

## Carbon monoxide kills seven in NE China coal mine

*Extract from Xinhua, China*

CHANGCHUN, -- Seven workers died of carbon monoxide poisoning Monday evening in a coal mine in northeast China's Jilin Province, local authorities said.

The accident occurred at about 6 p.m. in the Laoxiapan colliery in the Naizi Mountain in Jiaohe city. Five miners died at the scene and another two died during the rescue operation, the provincial emergency response office said.

Another four injured workers were rushed to hospital and were out of danger after medical treatment.

Work safety authorities were investigating the cause of the accident.

Wednesday 13 January 2009

## **USA: Dozer tumbles at northeast Wyoming mine accident**

*Casper Star-Tribune Online*

A 39-year-old worker escaped serious injury when her bulldozer tumbled about 55 feet down an embankment at Eagle Butte mine near Gillette.

The Campbell County Sheriff's Office says Frances Cope was operating a rubber tire dozer on the edge of a coal bench about 9:30 p.m. Saturday when she backed over the edge.

Alpha Coal West spokesman Steve Laird says the dozer landed on its back end, and then flipped over, coming to rest on its top.

Cope was wearing her seat belt, but she had to be extricated from the machine.

Cope was taken to Campbell County Memorial Hospital where she was examined and released.

Laird says Eagle Butte is conducting an internal investigation into the incident.

### **This week in mining accident history (2)**

**2 January 2006**

**Sago Mine**

**Sago, West Virginia, USA**

**Underground Coal Mine**

**Methane explosion**

**12 killed**

By Kayla Wardlow, Examiner.com

In 2005 the Sago mine, a small mine in Sago, West Virginia was written up by MSHA (Mine Safety and Health Administration) 208 times. Of those 208 regulation violations, 96 were considered "significant and substantial"; violations that MSHA believes would cause an accident that would bring serious injury to a miner.

On January 2nd, 2006 at 6 in the morning, two electric carts carried the first shift of miners

inside. Those riding in the second cart were about 2 miles in when an explosion happened. Several men were blown off the cart, as dust, dirt and gravel was blown at them. The air quickly filled with smoke, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, poisonous to breathe, as they stumbled back to the entrance. The 13 men in the first cart had already passed the sight of the explosion. They were trapped in the mine.

Terry Helms had gone to check the coal face, searching for a way out. The gasses quickly overwhelmed and killed him. The remaining 12 miners gathered in an area blocked in on 3 sides by coal. Stretching a ventilation canvas across the front, they waited for rescuers to appear.

Although the blast occurred shortly after six a.m., mine rescue crews weren't called by the company until 8:04 a.m. and MSHA wasn't alerted until 8:10.

The high levels of carbon monoxide prevented the rescue crews from entering for 12 hours. Testing the area the trapped miners were assumed to have been exposed to 1,300 parts of carbon monoxide per million. 200 PPM is considered unsafe. In spite of the high numbers, there was still hope for the miners. Each carried a self rescue device that provided breathable air for one hour, and 55-gallon drums stocked with emergency supplies were stationed throughout the mine. Rescue crews worked until 3 in the morning before withdrawing to start again the morning of January 3rd.

Later that day, at 5 p.m. they found the body of Terry Helms. By midnight the news had spread. 12 of the miners were found alive. The families who had gathered at the local Baptist church rejoiced. Medical crews on the scene prepared to treat the miners. News outlets spread the news. Across the country those who had followed the tragedy gave their thanks, and breathed a sigh of relief that all had worked out well.

Unfortunately, the news had spread too soon, and the mining company wasn't eager to share the updated reports.

As the families celebrated, CEO of International Coal Group (ICG) Ben Hatfield was almost immediately given the news that all but one man had died. Incredibly he waited 3 hours to visit the church and explain the truth, labelling the first report "misinformation". The families were stunned and angry, one woman lunging at Hatfield was dragged away by state troopers.

Randall McCloy Jr., the only survivor was carried out and given medical attention. He eventually came out of the coma and was able to talk about what happened.

He stated that "the mine filled quickly with fumes and thick smoke and that breathing conditions were nearly unbearable" and that of the 12, only eight of the oxygen packs were working. The remaining four, Martin Toler, Jesse Jones, Jerry Groves and Tom Anderson shared with the others. They took turns pounding on the mine bolts with a sledgehammer, until all were exhausted, to signal their location, and never heard anything in response.

At that point, he says, the miners, despite their fears, "began to accept our fate. Toler led us all in the Sinner's Prayer. We prayed a little longer, then someone suggested that we each write letters to our loved ones. Some drifted off into what appeared to be a deep sleep, and one person sitting near me collapsed and fell off his bucket, not moving. It was clear that there was nothing I could do to help him. The last person I remember speaking to was Jackie Weaver, who reassured me that if it were our time to go, then God's will would be fulfilled. As my trapped co-workers lost consciousness one by one, the room grew still and I continued to sit and wait, unable to do much else. I have no idea how much time went by before I also passed out from the gas and smoke, awaiting rescue."

A memorial service was held on January 16th at the Sago Baptist Church. Over 1.800 people attended to remember the 12 men who died;

- Terry Helms, Fire boss/mine examiner, 29 years of mining experience
- Martin Toler Jr., Section foreman, 32 years of mining experience

- Alva M. Bennett, Continuous miner operator, 29 years of mining experience
- Fred Ware, Continuous miner operator, 37 years
- Jesse Jones, Roof bolter operator, 16 years
- Dave Lewis, Roof bolter operator, 1 year, 8 months of mining experience
- Jerry Groves, Roof bolter operator, 28 years of mining experience
- Tom Anderson, Shuttle car operator, 10 years of mining experience
- George Hamner Jr., Shuttle car operator, 26 years of mining experience
- James Bennett, Shuttle car operator, 25 years of mining experience
- Marshall Winans, Scoop operator, 23 years of mining experience
- Jackie Weaver, Section electrician, 26 years of mining experience.

A monument was dedicated on August 21st, 2006, featuring carved photographs of each of the 12 miners who died. It also features the quote, "We'll see you on the other side," taken from the note Martin Toler Jr. left for his family.

MSHA completed a mandatory investigation, but the cause of the explosion is undetermined. Many have spoken out to place the blame on the company for its perceived negligence. In a letter to the families, survivor Randall McCloy Jr. stated, "we immediately shut down the roof bolter, and the incident was reported up the line to our superiors. I noticed the following day that the gas leak had been plugged with glue normally used to secure the bolts."

No charges were brought against ICG, and to the outrage of many, the Sago mine reopened in March of 2006. Only a year later, the mine closed for good.

## Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

### S

- stamper shoe** A heavy iron or steel foot of the stamper that crushes ore against a die inside the mortar box of a battery.

**HAPPY and SAFE NEW YEAR** -Ed