



Mining Accident News No.1005

20 to 28 February 2010

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Monday 22 February 2010

QLD: Mine hours worrying church

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Churches across central Queensland are trying to help families adversely affected by the long hours worked by miners.

Rockhampton's Catholic Bishop, Brian Heenan, has raised concern about the impact of mining on family life.

Bishop Heenan says an increasing number of families are seeking help as the main bread winner is working 12 hour shifts in the mine.

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

He says church groups will meet later this week to develop strategies to help.

"We're not condemning anybody, we're just simply saying that is there a better way we can support families because this is the way the mining industry has organised itself," he said.

"It's putting pressure on family life and what can be done by the community generally to support family life and minimise those pressures."

Bishop Heenan has travelled through Moranbah, Clermont and other communities where mining is a major source of employment.

"The cause of those hours the miners have to work, the family life is affected, now that the father is not there when the children are going off to school or coming home from school or going to bed or so forth and families find it difficult to be together as a family," he said.

USA: Coal industry challenges of safety violations swamp system

Extract from courier-journal.com, Ky. USA

WASHINGTON — Coal operators in Kentucky and other states have dramatically increased challenges to federal citations for safety violations in the past few years — swamping the appeals process.

Some members of Congress contend that the vast backlog of cases under review — more than 15,000 — is the result of potentially unsafe mines jamming the system to stay in business.

"This growing backlog indicates that certain mine operators are abusing their right to challenge a violation," said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, which is scheduled to hold a hearing Tuesday on the issue. "These appeals are clogging the system and putting miners in danger."

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In Kentucky, 80 percent of 536 high-dollar fines for the “significant and substantial” safety violations — the most serious kind — are being contested by the mine operators, according to federal Mine Safety and Health Administration records. Some citations are more than two years old.

In Indiana, 86 percent of 288 fines for the most serious violations are being challenged.

MSHA inspectors define “significant and substantial” safety violations as those likely to result in serious injury or illness. Citations in the backlog include such things as dangerous electrical and mechanical equipment, accumulation of explosive coal dust, improper mine ventilation and roof-control procedures and lack of miner training.

While violations must be corrected when they are cited, safety advocates say the delay in imposing financial penalties undercuts the deterrent effect that those penalties are intended to have.

MSHA records also show that mining companies aren't just challenging the biggest fines for serious violations — they are disputing citations for lesser violations as well.

As a result, the agency charged with deciding the merits of the challenges, the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission, has seen its caseload explode.

“The system is not fair to anybody,” said Lexington attorney Tony Opegard, a former federal and state mine safety official. “The system is broken. The interests of coal miners, mine operators and even inspectors aren't being served.”

Tuesday 23 February 2010

QLD: Mine production resumes after fatigue dispute

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Work has resumed at a number of coal mines in Queensland's central highlands after being shut down for seven hours amid safety concerns.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) issued a directive just before 6:00am (AEST) yesterday to stop work at all BMA sites, claiming the company's fatigue management standard represented an unacceptable level of risk to workers.

Two weeks ago the company implemented new fatigue management guidelines, increasing the maximum shift length from 12 to 14 hours.

But a review of the policy by the State Mine Inspectorate found it did not change the existing fatigue management procedures, and ordered work resume just after 1:00pm.

BMA chief executive Marcelo Bastos says the procedures will continue to apply on a site by site basis.

Meanwhile, the CFMEU says a new report has highlight the need for more work on particular safety issues within the industry.

The reported reviewed an emergency exercise held late last year at Caledon Coal's Cook Colliery, near Blackwater in central Queensland, which tested miners' abilities under pressure.

Regular exercises have been held across the Bowen Basin since the Moura mine explosion killed 11 people in 1994.

CFMEU spokesman Greg Dalliston says while safety standards are improving, there are still concerns.

“We've run 10 of these over 10 years and still the standard of ... rescuers and changeover rescuers is still a major issue that the industry as a whole hasn't picked up on to ensure people are having real or close to real as possible simulated training in that area,” he said.

“Lines of communication around the site and off the site are usually not too bad.”

Polish miner killed in Czech mining accident

Extract from EarthTimes.org

Prague- A 43-year-old Polish miner died early Tuesday in a coal mining accident in the north-

eastern Czech Republic, a spokesman for the mine's owner said. The man was killed by a coal-cutting machine one kilometre below the ground in the Karvina mine, said its owner, OKD, the country's biggest mining firm.

The cause of the first deadly accident in the OKD mines this year was not immediately known and is under investigation, the company said.

OKD operates coal mines in the country's north-east. Last year, three people died in its mines. The firm's owner, New World Resources NV, listed its shares on Prague, Warsaw and London stock exchanges in 2008.

17 miners killed in northwest Turkey mine collapse

Extract from the Houston Chronicle, USA

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's state-run news agency says 17 workers have been killed as a methane gas explosion caused the collapse of an underground chamber in a coal mine in northwestern Turkey.

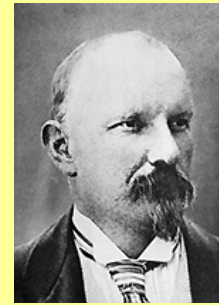
The state-run Anatolia news agency said 49 miners were believed to be in the mine at the time of the collapse and 29 other miners have been evacuated and the rescue work is now over. Initially more than two dozen miners were trapped. Nine workers were hospitalized, some with severe burns, and one of them died, the agency said.

The blast Tuesday at the mine near the town of Dursunbey in Balikesir province buried the miners nearly 820 feet (250 meters) below the surface. The mine is 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the center of Dursunbey.

In December, a similar accident killed 19 miners in Bursa province, also in northwestern Turkey. Safety violations and outdated equipment have been factors in past mine accidents in the country.

In Turkey's worst mining disaster, a gas explosion killed 270 workers near the Black Sea port of Zonguldak in 1992.

Quote of the week



"The danger of success is that it makes us forget the world's dreadful injustice."

Pierre-Jules Renard,
(French philosopher, 1864-1910)

USA: Federal No. 2 Mine Closed

Extract from State Journal, USA

FAIRVIEW -- The Mine Safety and Health Administration evacuated and shut down the Federal Number 2 Mine last Wednesday, officials said.

Monday, the 400-500 miners who work at Federal Number 2 were still hearing a message from Patriot Coal telling them the mine is idle until further notice.

An explosive level of the mixture of methane and oxygen was found in at least one of the mine fills at Federal Number 2, said officials at the Office of Miner's Health, Safety and Training.

There could be up to 90 fills in that mine, which are areas that have already been mined and are now sealed off and filled in as a safety precaution.

State regulations require those areas to be checked every 24 hours, officials said.

Companies normally add nitrogen to eliminate the explosive mixture, but Patriot Coal officials have not said if that's what they will do in this situation.

Patriot Coal has made no comment on the situation and hasn't said when it expects the miners to return to work.

MSHA will have to inspect the mine for safety before it can reopen.

Last year, U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Congressmen Alan Mollohan toured the mine to discuss safety.

USA: Judge rejects coal company's Ill. lawsuit vs. MSHA

Extract from The Washington Post, USA

EAST ST. LOUIS, Ill. -- A federal judge has tossed out a coal company's lawsuit accusing mine regulators of abusive oversight and quota-driven citations targeting its southern Illinois operation, ruling that the company didn't sufficiently make its case.

U.S. District Judge Michael Reagan, in his ruling last Friday, gave American Coal Co. until March 4 to take another try with a retooled lawsuit featuring "new counts that advance valid theories of relief" from the U.S. Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Reagan wrote that if the company did not meet the deadline, he would throw out the November 2008 lawsuit "with prejudice," meaning American Coal would be barred from suing again with the same claim.

While rejecting the mining administration's claims that the federal court lacked jurisdiction to hear the case because administrative remedies had not been exhausted, Reagan said American Coal had not presented "allegations entitling it to relief under the only theories it advances."

In the lawsuit requesting that a judge prevent the administration from handing out what the company called "unfounded and baseless violation citations," Reagan said it was "possible that the allegations in the complaint entitle American Coal to some sort of relief. Whatever that would be, though, would not be under the theories advanced so far.

"Accordingly, the court will give American Coal one last chance to justify its suit," the judge wrote.

Messages left with the Mine Safety and Health Administration and attorneys for both sides Tuesday were not returned.

Murray Energy Corp., American Coal's Cleveland-based corporate parent that entered the national spotlight in 2007 when nine people died in one of its Utah mines, sent an e-mail to The Associated Press declining to discuss Reagan's ruling, citing the pending litigation.

American Coal filed the lawsuit just weeks after the mining administration fined the company \$1.46 million for alleged infractions involving its Galatia operation in southern Illinois' Saline County.

At that time, other mine operators said the Mine Safety and Health Administration had become heavy-handed - stifling productivity and cutting into profits - to counter criticism of questionable oversight after a string of high-profile mine accidents that killed dozens in recent years.

Mine-safety regulators told a House panel Tuesday that a backlog of new cases has jumped from roughly 2,700 in 2006 to about 16,000 cases now. Some Democrats claim mine operators are purposely clogging the system by contesting more violations. The mining industry blames new regulations for eliminating more informal procedures to compromise penalties.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration this month set a mid-March deadline to start cracking down on the most common violations cited during fatal accident investigations. As part of part of the agency's "Rules to Live By" campaign, inspectors also will look specifically to make operators obey 24 regulations breached in about half of 589 mining deaths from 2000 through 2008. Once the agency starts cracking down on violators, inspectors also will look for reasons to increase fines, MSHA chief Joe Main said.

Even before filing its lawsuit, American Coal in mid-2008 pressed the Labor Department's internal watchdog to investigate the regulator's

inspection practices because of its monitoring of American Coal's southern Illinois operation.

Murray said the fines levied in October 2008 were politically motivated retaliation for the company's pursuit of the probe into the agency and were "one more example of MSHA trying to rehabilitate its own public image at the expense of mining companies and business."

Wednesday 24 February 2010

USA: W.Va. will seek to ban miner over safety records

Extract from the Daily Mail, Charleston, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The state agency charged with enforcing coal mine safety laws will move to ban a miner accused of falsifying safety records from ever working in a West Virginia coal mine, a spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Miners' Health, Safety and Training spokeswoman Jama Jarrett said the agency will take action against John Renner once an investigation against him is complete. Renner received his underground mining certificate 2004 and his assistant foreman certificate in 2008.

Renner is charged in a federal document with falsifying safety inspection reports at Patriot Coal's Federal No. 2 mine. The document says the charge stems from his Jan. 24 inspection of the mine's No. 27 block seal.

Lawyers representing Renner did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment on Wednesday.

The state launched an investigation after receiving a complaint on Jan. 24. The state investigation was halted after the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration got involved. Falsifying safety reports is a federal crime.

Jarrett said during an interview with state inspectors, Renner told them that he had not completed part of his examination that included methane gas levels behind sealed portions of the mine. There are more than 90 seals in the north-central West Virginia mine, she said.

Federal mining rules require action if methane gas levels in sealed areas reach explosive ranges. MSHA adopted the rule after 12 men died after methane exploded in a sealed area of the Sago Mine on Jan. 2, 2006.

The Federal No. 2 mine was idled Feb. 18 due to dangerous atmospheric conditions in a sealed area. The company said it is working with MSHA on a revised ventilation plan.

Jarrett said the Renner investigation triggered the review of the mine's sealed areas.

The federal agency routinely warns coal companies that changes underground caused by winter weather can increase methane levels and make working conditions unsafe. Companies are to ensure mines are properly ventilated.

This week in mining accident history

27 February 1943
Smith Mine No.3
Bearcreek, Montana, USA
Underground Coal Mine
Methane explosion
75 dead

Source <http://en.wikipedia.org>

The Smith Mine disaster was the worst coal mining disaster in the State of Montana, and the 43rd worst in the United States, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

On February 27, 1943, at approximately 9:37 a.m., an explosion ripped through Smith Mine #3, a coal mine located between the towns of Bearcreek and Washoe. Since it was a Saturday, there was a short crew in the mine. Of the 77 men working that day, only 3 got out of the mine alive, and one of the rescued workers died soon afterwards. The report from the United States Bureau of Mines states that 30 of the men were killed instantly by the explosion, and the remainder died either through injuries sustained in the explosion, or through

suffocation from the carbon monoxide and methane gas in the mine. The explosion was deep underground, and wasn't even heard from the mouth of the mine, despite having enough power to knock a 20-ton locomotive off its tracks 1/4 mile from the blast origin.



The Smith Mine, circa 1940



Site of the Smith Mine now

All of the bodies were removed from the mine. There is a highway plaque near the mouth of the mine, which was never reopened, and there are memorials in the cemeteries in Bearcreek and nearby Red Lodge, the county seat for Carbon County.

The explosion was attributed to a buildup of methane gas in the mine. The cause of detonation is unknown, but various reports note that men were allowed to smoke in the mine, and that fuses for blasting were lit with matches.

The Smith Coal Mine disaster was one of the nation's worst coal-mining accidents, but because it occurred during World War II, it was quickly forgotten by all, except those who lived through it.

The disaster was the subject of a book, *The Darkest Hour*, by Gary Robson, and another

book, *Quiet Courage*, by Jeffrey McNeish, who lost 11 members of his family, including his great-grandfather, in the disaster. There was a further book in 2009 by Susan Kushner Resnick, *Goodbye Wives and Daughters*.

Thursday 25 February 2010

Poland: Miner dies in Lower Silesia

Extract from thenews.pl

One coal miner has been killed and three injured in an explosives accident at the Lubin colliery in Lower Silesia, southern Poland.

The men are employees of the Enterprise Services, Mining and Construction in Czestochowa, a company that performs services for KGHM SA.

The incident took place at 4.32 CET this morning when the men were using explosives.

We do not exactly know what happened and why the tragedy occurred," said Andrzej Popa of the Enterprise Services, Mining and Construction company in Czestochowa.

The man who died was 53 year old resident of Lubin.

Friday 26 February 2010

Turkey: "Clear Negligence" in Mine Explosion that Killed 13 Workers

Extract from bianet.org

According to mining trade unionist Görgün, it is clear that there were faults with the mine's air ventilation, early warning system and auditing. Thirteen miners died in a gas explosion on 23 February, eighteen were injured.

Tayfun Görgün, president of the DEV MADEN-SEN (Turkey Revolutionary Mine Search and Processing Workers) Trade Union, believes that there are three clear areas of negligence in the

latest mining accident in Balıkesir, western Turkey.

On Tuesday, 23 February, thirteen miners were killed and eighteen injured in a gas explosion in the Dursunbey mine in the province of Balıkesir.

Speaking with *bianet*, Görgün listed the following problems:

Air ventilation insufficient: A gas explosion only happens if enough gas has been allowed to accumulate. This means that the ventilation system either did not work at all or only in an insufficient manner.

Early warning system deficient: When gas accumulates, the early warning system normally needs to be triggered. Either there was no such system or it did not work. Normally, when the gas level rises, there are several warnings. The excuse that a warning came eight minutes prior to the explosion is unsatisfactory. It should have warned at a much earlier stage.

Lack of auditing: This is the second large accident of the Şentaş Mining Company. In 2006, 17 people died. The mine was closed down and only later opened again. This shows us that there has not been enough auditing, or that problems found during auditing have not been remedied. The Prime Minister says that there was an audit at the mine 20 days ago. This shows that either the audit was only cursory or the faults were not dealt with.

Görgün added that these problems were not confined to the Dursunbey mine but an indication of major problems in the provision of work safety.

State knows the problems: In 2005, the Ministry of Labour's Work Review Committee found problems in mines and reported them. However, there have been no preventative measures.

Death for profits: The managers are covering up their faults by speaking of an "exemplary business". If that were the case, only someone laying a bomb in the mine could have caused such an explosion. This was not an

unpredictable accident, it was negligence. The employers wanted to maximise profits and minimise expenditure, so they scrimped on safety. Activity in the mine should have been forbidden until a suitable safety system was installed.

Auditing carried out in Ankara: Recently the Ministry of Labour has carried out the audits not on site, but in Ankara, the capital. A person representing the employers is called and problems are discussed on paper. The industry is being protected at the cost of people's lives. Also, there are not only deaths; in this accident, 18 workers were injured. Work-related illnesses are not ascertained at all.

Lack of technical personnel: The number of technical inspectors is ridiculously low. There need to be hundreds of engineers and technical employees in order to control the ventilation and warning systems and to check fortifications against mine collapse or flooding of mines. Currently inspectors mostly concern themselves with whether social security contributions are being paid for workers. (TK/AG)

Sudden power failure leads to death of 2 brother-miners; 2 other siblings missing

Extract from Minda News, Philippines

GENERAL SANTOS CITY -- A sudden power failure late Thursday afternoon is being blamed for the death of at least two brothers inside a tunnel in T'boli, South Cotabato, Philippines.

Brothers Toto and Gary Olin were reportedly suffocated inside a mine tunnel at the gold rush village of Kematu in T'boli town after a sudden power failure cut off the tunnel's oxygen supply. Two other brothers, Boy and Adel, are still missing.

Ramon Ponce de Leon, South Cotabato environmental management office chief, said Friday that rescuers recovered the remains of two miners Thursday evening inside the tunnel several hours after the incident was first reported at around 5 p.m.

“Because of the brownout, the machine providing oxygen to the workers inside the tunnel stopped functioning,” said Ponce de Leon, citing an initial investigation conducted by their personnel.

As of Friday morning, he said, rescuers were still trying to locate the missing Boy and Adel.

The entire province of South Cotabato has been experiencing rotational brownouts that last for five to six hours daily due to a load shedding scheme implemented by the National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP).

The long brownouts are blamed on the drastic decline of the generating capacities of the National Power Corporation’s hydroelectric plants due to the El Nino-triggered reduction of the water levels of Lake Lanao and the Agus and Pulangi river systems

Senior Insp. Marvin Dua-Dua, T’boli police chief, said they would resume the rescue operations for the still missing miners who are believed to have been trapped deep into the tunnel.

But Dua-Dua said the two missing miners may have also been possibly suffocated by the gaseous emissions inside the tunnel similar to what happened to their two other siblings.

“We’re doing everything to rescue them the soonest possible time,” he said.

Dua-Dua said their initial investigation showed that the mine tunnel is reportedly owned by a certain Edgardo Madiskay and its operations are being financed by businessman Elmer Cabradilla of Alabel, Sarangani Province.

Ponce de Leon said they will conduct another investigation to determine the real cause of the death of the miners.

He said they have initially coordinated with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ (DENR) Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) to help look into the incident.

“We want to know what really happened. The initial report cited toxic fumes emanating from the tunnel as the cause of the accident but we

also want to check if portions of the tunnel had collapsed prior to it,” he added.

Constancio A. Paye, Jr., regional director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, said based on initial investigation, the workers could have died from suffocation.

“There was a brownout in the area and the blower providing the tunnel with oxygen failed to work. The province has been experiencing power outages since recently,” he said.

Paye said the tunnel is located inside the 21-hectare Minahang Bayan or People’s Mining Site, as declared by the provincial government in the 1990s.

The Minahang Bayan area is inside the mines development of Tribal Mining, which is backed by Canadian firm, Cadan Resources Corp.

Cadan Resources said this week its T’boli gold-silver project is expected to be operational within the year, after years of exploration activities.

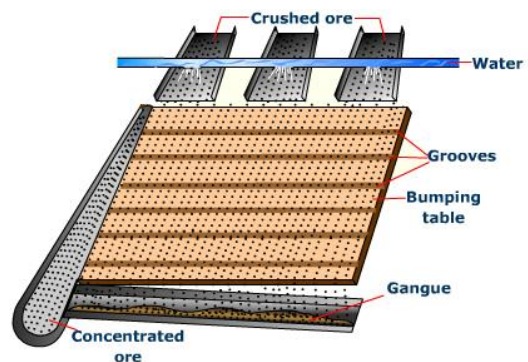
Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

T

tables A machine with a table-like surface covered with riffles and used for the concentration of heavy minerals. It is given a horizontal shaking motion and the pulp, which passed over it, is sorted according to weight. A common type is the Wilfley table.

The Wilfley Table has been manufactured in Australia for over 100 years and still retains many of the original features incorporated into the tables by Arthur Redman Wilfley.



-Ed