



Mining Accident News No.1010

1 to 9 April 2010

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Thursday 1 April 2010

Philippines: 3 killed in Benguet mine cave-in

Extract from abs-cbnNEWS.com

MANILA, Philippines - Three miners were killed in a mining accident in Luneta village, Itogon, Benguet Tuesday night, officials said.

John Latungan, vice-president of Luneta Miners Association, identified two of the fatalities as Rudy Petra Corta Gilles, 40; and Edgar Sucalo, 36. The name of the third miner has been withheld until his immediate family has been notified.

He said at least 20 miners were working in the underground goldmine in groups starting at 7 p.m, Tuesday. He said only 6 miners were at the bottom of the 80-foot mine when it caved in before midnight.

Three of the miners were rescued while the rest died.

USA: Two Mine Accidents Reported in West Virginia

Extract from WSAZ.com, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Two miners are in the hospital after two separate accidents in West Virginia.

The latest accident happened around 11:30 p.m. Wednesday at the New Town Energy Eagle Mine in Comfort. That's in Boone County.

Jama Jarrett with the Mine Safety Office tells WSAZ.com a mining operator got pinned between a machine and mine wall. The miner was taken to CAMC General with serious injuries.

The other mining related accident happened at the Pinnacle Mine in Wyoming County around 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

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

Editor: Mark Freeman
e mark.freeman@industry.nsw.gov.au

Jarrett tells WSAZ.com a contract worker was working on a mine shaft when he fell through the floor. The man suffered injuries to his head and upper body.

Clifford Natural Resource owns that mine in Wyoming County.

No names have been released at this time.

WA: Fortescue seeks death case dismissal

Fortescue Metals is applying to have charges relating to its workers' deaths and injuries during Cyclone George dismissed as the miner was charged under the wrong laws.

It is applying to have all the charges dismissed as both the miner and its subsidiary The Pilbara Infrastructure's (TPI) mines were exempt from the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Instead, Fortescue claims its safety management procedures come under the Mines Safety and Inspection Act of 1994, rather than the previous act under which it was charged.

It would aim to have the case dismissed as the charges failed to identify the measures Fortescue should have taken to effectively avoid risks, according to the West Australian.

Fortescue and its subsidiary TPI have pleaded not guilty to the charges of failing to provide adequate safety measures in the event of a cyclone.

Two people were killed after Cyclone George hit Fortescue's camp 100 km south of Port Hedland, on 9 March 2007.

Fortescue is the first of several companies to go to court over charges arising from the cyclone.

Friday 2 April 2010

32 miners killed in different coal mine accidents in China

Extract from The Times of India

BEIJING: Twenty five miners were killed in three different coal mine mishaps in China during the

last few hours and fate of 153 miner trapped in flood waters since Sunday is still unknown as energy hungry China experienced a spate of mine accidents during the past few days.

Nineteen miners were killed in central China mine explosion on Thursday night at an illegal coal mine in Luoyang City in Henan Province, while about 24 people were believed trapped underground.

About 90 miners were working under the ground when a gas explosion occurred at 7:20pm in a coal pit privately owned by Guomin Mining Co.

The blast killed eight miners underground and four on the surface. Another two persons were killed in the collapse of structures on the ground as a result of the explosion.

State-owned Xinhua news agency quoted officials as saying that 50 miners were rescued, leaving about 32 still trapped underground.

The mine is being illegally run and its owner Wang Guozheng, has disappeared.

Just as rescuers made frantic efforts to save the trapped miners, yet another mine accident took place this time in northwest China's Shaanxi Province where nine miners were killed in a fire accident, according to the provincial government today.

Twenty-seven miners were working underground when the fire occurred at around 7pm on Thursday in the Quanzigou Coal Mine in Longmen Township, Hancheng City.

Among them, 17 were brought out safely a government official said.

One injured miner has been rushed to hospital. Meanwhile news from Nanning in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region said four people died of carbon monoxide poisoning after self-made explosives detonated in an illegal mine shaft in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Thursday.

One rescuer was poisoned by the gas and had been taken to hospital, Guangxi Public Security Department said in a statement.

The blast occurred at 10:30am inside the mine shaft at Pinggui County, Hezhou City, Xinhua reported.

Five people were trapped underground after a coal mine was flooded Thursday afternoon in northeastern China's Heilongjiang Province, the provincial coal mine work safety authorities said Friday morning.

This week in mining accident history

2 April 1898

Pudley-Hill Coal Pit

Old Park, Shropshire, UK

Underground Coal Mine

Fall down shaft

1 dead

Source: www.shropshirecmc.org.uk/papers/index.html

Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News
2nd April 1898

FRIGHTFUL FALL AT OLD PARK

A MAN DROPS DOWN A PIT-SHAFT

On Saturday an inquest was held by Mr. J. V. T. Lander, coroner, on view of the body of Richard Rowlands, a miner, who was killed under shocking circumstances.

Mrs. Rowlands identified the body as that of her husband. He was employed by Mr. Ferriday at Pudley Pit. On Thursday he went to work, and Mr. Watkiss brought him home hurt.

John Freeman said he was working with deceased repairing at the pumping-shaft. All went well through the day until about seven in the evening, when deceased must have slipped and fell down the shaft about 30 yards. Witness then descended and got him up. Witness thought it was a pure accident, as deceased was an experienced man, and was quite sober.

Sarah Ann Watkiss, of Old Park, said she laid the body of deceased out. His left leg and right

thigh were broken and his head was bruised; he had made no complaint or reference to the accident. The jury returned a verdict that deceased died from injuries received through falling down the pit accidentally, and added a rider that in their opinion men should not be allowed to do such work without a safeguard being provided, such as a belt.

Saturday 3 April 2010

Rescuers enter flooded mine in China

Extract from CNN International

Rescue teams entered a flooded mine in northern China on Saturday to help 153 workers trapped for almost a week, state-run media reported.

At least 13 rescuers, including six divers, had entered the mine in Shanxi Province, Xinhua news agency said.

The crews had boats and floatation devices, and underwater cameras to film the shaft environment, Xinhua said.



Mine workers prepare to send equipment into the Wangjialing coal mine where 153 workers are trapped, March 31, 2010.

A total of 283 rescuers are taking part in the rescue effort, and ambulances for each trapped miner were at the scene. Nearly 156 medical officials were also ready to provide immediate treatment to the trapped miners, the news agency said.

The rescue effort comes a day after crews heard sounds that included trapped miners knocking on a metal pipe, according to Xinhua.

After rescuers at the Wangjialing mine heard the noise, they knocked on a pipe in response and shouted, and the trapped miners shouted back.

The level of water in the mine had dropped by 5.3 meters since it flooded Sunday, officials said.

Wangjialing mine flooded Sunday when underground water rushed into the pit, which was under construction, according to Xinhua.

At least 261 miners were working at the time, 108 of whom were rescued. A wire was used to pump out water and send down food, Xinhua said.

If the workers cannot be saved, the accident will be China's worst mining disaster since 2007, Xinhua said.

About three years ago, a total of 181 workers died at two neighboring flooded coal mines, officials said.

Monday 5 April 2010

114 Chinese Miners Are Rescued

Extract from The New York Times, USA

From the start, China's latest coal mine disaster seemed likely to end as so many others had in a country where an average of seven miners die every day: a failed rescue effort, grieving relatives, few if any survivors.

But then, more than a week after the half-built Wangjialing mine in northern China was flooded with millions of gallons of water, rescuers heard taps on a metal pipe. They furiously pumped water out of the shaft and sent glucose injections down through a pipe. By late Monday, rescuers had dragged 115 men up to safety, though 38 others remained missing.

Survivors said they had strapped themselves to shaft walls with their belts so they would not drown, hung there for days, then jumped into a mine cart that floated by. Others said they ate bark from the pine pillars used to construct the mine.

By any standard in the dangerous world of mining — and certainly by those of China's especially deadly industry — it was a marvel of good fortune.

"These trapped people have made it through eight days and eight nights — this is the miracle of life," said Luo Lin, head of the State Administration of Work Safety. "Secondly, our rescue plan has been effective. This is a miracle in China's search and rescue history."

David Feickert, a coal mine safety adviser to the Chinese government, told The Associated Press, "This is probably one of the most amazing rescues in the history of mining anywhere."



A coal miner was rushed into a hospital on Monday after being rescued from the Wangjialing mine in Shanxi Province in Northern China (Ng Han Guan/Associated Press)

Investigators blamed the usual culprit in China's regular mine accidents: a lack of safety precautions.

For days before the mine flooded, managers ignored water leaks that presaged trouble, according to preliminary findings by the State Administration of Work Safety. Miners had been ordered to step up the pace of construction to meet an October deadline to begin production at the mine, the agency said.

"The miners should never have been put in this situation in the first place," Mr. Feickert said.

Had rescue efforts failed, the mine disaster would have been China's deadliest in more than two years. Although the government has managed to significantly reduce the death rate at coal mines since 2002, its safety record remains among the world's worst.

The accident occurred on March 28 as workers digging tunnels broke through a wall into an old shaft filled with water, flooding their V-shaped shaft. Five of the workers' nine platforms were submerged. The exit out of the pit was blocked.

Of the 261 miners underground that day, 108 made it to safety. The rest were trapped and feared dead.

More than 3,000 workers participated in the rescue operation. At least half a dozen pumps were installed, draining the mine of more than 11 million gallons of water a day, officials said.

By Friday, the water level inside the mine had dropped nearly 11 feet. Workers had drilled a hole through the dirt and pumped oxygen to the area where they hoped to find survivors, according to news reports.

But there were no signs of life until rescuers heard the tapping on the pipe Friday afternoon.

Rescuers tapped and shouted into a pipe in response. They also sent down bags of glucose, milk, a pen, paper, a phone and a plastic bottle. And, requisite for a high-profile rescue effort that could have political consequences, they sent exhortations from both Communist Party and government leadership bodies.

"Dear fellow workers, the Party Central Committee, the State Council and the whole nation have been concerned for your safety," one letter began.

It ended, "Hold on to the last."

When rescuers pulled one pipe to the surface, they found an iron wire tied to the end, apparently a signal from survivors, according to Xinhua, the state-run news agency. Rescuers also spotted swaying lights at the opposite end of the shaft, another possible sign of life.

On Saturday afternoon, a team of divers was sent down. But the divers returned within a couple of hours, reporting that the black murky water made it hard to reach the workers' platforms. On Sunday, as water levels

continued to drop, rescuers in inflatable rafts paddled into the dark, watery pit, letting air out of the rafts when they got stuck in the narrow passages.

They found survivors that night, most of them stranded on a single platform.

One miner spotted a raft and called out, "Can you get me out of here?"

"Since we got in, we will definitely will be able to take you out of here," a rescuer yelled back, The Associated Press reported.

The first nine survivors were carried out of the mine's mouth very early Monday morning, seven and a half days after the accident, on a holiday called Tomb-Sweeping Day when Chinese commemorate the dead. Rescuers burst into tears and hugged one another in relief.

Thousands of people keeping vigil along the roadside cheered as ambulances raced the miners to the nearest hospital. The number saved grew throughout the day as hundreds of rescuers entered the mine.

CCTV, the state-run television network, showed rescuers clad in blue and orange jumpsuits carrying out stretchers laden with barefoot miners, wrapped in green blankets, eyes covered with towels to shield them from the light.

One reached out his blackened hands to grasp those of rescuers in thanks. Another was still gripping his miner's lamp. A third showed rescuers a pocket full of sawdust, describing it as hard to chew.

The rescue team's chief medical officer told reporters that the survivors were weak, severely dehydrated and suffering from hypothermia and skin infections. Some were in shock. Although none were in critical condition, he described 26 as more seriously ill than the rest.

"I have not slept for several days," one rescuer, Wei Fusheng, told CCTV, weeping with joy. "Our efforts have not been in vain."

Still, some relatives, carefully sequestered and kept under watch in nearby hotels, seemed destined for bad news.

As of Monday night, there was no word on the status of the 38 workers still trapped. Some rescued miners said they had seen bodies of dead co-workers, but how many workers might have died was unknown.

Explosion kills workers at US coal mine

Extract from SKYNews.com.au

Six miners have been killed and at least 21 are unaccounted for after an explosion at an underground coal mine, the state mining director says.



Ron Wooten said the blast was reported around 3pm on Monday (0500 AEST on Tuesday) at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine in Raleigh County, about 48 kilometres south of Charleston.

The company did not provide details on the extent of the damage. A Boone County ambulance dispatcher also said he has the same number of fatalities and missing miners.

The mine is operated by Massey subsidiary Performance Coal Co.

Mine emergency crews from the State Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training were headed to the scene, but agency spokeswoman Jama Jarrett had no more details.

At least three fatalities have happened at the mine in the past dozen years.

In 1998, a worker was killed when a support beam collapsed, dumping bags of cement mix and other materials onto the man, according to a report from the federal Mine Safety Health Administration. Federal investigators blamed poor welding and construction.



Branch mine in Raleigh Co.

In 2001, another worker at the mine died after a portion of roof fell in on him, and an electrician died after being electrocuted while repairing a shuttle car there in 2003.

The mine produced 1.2 million tons of coal in 2009, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration. Massey Energy is a publicly traded company based in Richmond, Virginia, that has 2.2 billion tons of coal reserves in southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia and Tennessee, according to the company's website.

In 2006, 12 miners died in a methane explosion at the Sago Mine in West Virginia. Six were killed in the collapse of the Crandall Canyon mine in Utah in 2007.

USA: Experts say mining safety has improved since Crandall disaster

Extract from fox13now, Utah, USA

SALT LAKE CITY - Standards have certainly changed since the 2007 Crandall Canyon mining disaster, says Mining Engineering Dept. Chairman, Mike Nelson. "Last year in 2009 had the fewest number of fatalities ever in the mining industry," Nelson says. "They're definitely not where we want them to be -- the accident rate for the mining industry. We look at the lost time

per 100 workers per year and its around four. We'd like to see it much less, close to one or zero." Ed Havas, who represents the families of miners killed in Utah, says that on a personal level, for the family of miners trapped "it's emotionally, just such a gut wrenching, trying time. Mostly the waiting and the not knowing for those that are waiting word about their loved ones."

Havas thinks lawsuits are likely in the case of the recent West Virginia mine collapse.

"Lawsuits are highly likely probability for a case like this because for there to be a disaster of this magnitude something went wrong somewhere and if that turns out to have been the failing of the company or some entity that should have taken better care then they need to be held responsible," said Havas.

Tuesday 6 April 2010

USA UPDATE: 25 dead, 4 missing in West Virginia mine disaster

Extract from CTV.ca, Toronto, Canada

West Virginia authorities are still searching for four miners who went missing in the aftermath of a deadly mining blast that killed 25 people at a coal mine Monday afternoon.



A Massey Energy coal silo towers over Marsh Fork Elementary near the Upper Big Branch Coal Mine in Naoma, W.Va., Tuesday, April 6, 2010

Believed to be the worst U.S. mining disaster in more than 25 years, the blast at the Upper Big Branch mine occurred at about 3 p.m., while 31 workers were in the midst of a shift change. A build-up of methane gas is the suspected cause of the explosion at the mine, which is located

about 48 kilometres south of the state capital of Charleston. So far, the bodies of 11 miners have been recovered, CNN's Sandra Endo told CTV on Tuesday, the day after the disaster.

Efforts to locate the four missing miners have been stalled by a build-up of methane gas in the areas where rescuers intend to search.

Rescuers plan to drill a 300-metre hole into the earth to release methane gas before they attempt to locate the missing miners. But they need to bulldoze an access road before drilling the hole.

Joe Manchin, the state governor, told an early morning news conference that it would take at least 12 hours to get the rescuers back into the mine, an event he predicted was unlikely to occur before 6 p.m. ET.

"It's going to be a long day and we're not going to have a lot of information until we can get the first hole through," Manchin said.

It is believed that the four missing miners are unlikely to have survived.



Kevin Stricklin, chief of coal mine safety for the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, states Tuesday, April 6, 2010 that there are now twenty five confirmed dead following a Monday evening explosion at Massey Energy Co.'s sprawling Upper Big Branch mine in Montcoal, W.Va.

"All we have left is hope and we're going to continue to do what we can," Kevin Stricklin, an administrator with the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, told a news conference.

"But I'm just trying to be honest with everybody and say that the situation does look dire."

Stricklin said a group of miners leaving the mine felt a blast of air and turned back to investigate what was happening. When they returned, they found nine others, seven of whom were dead.

Additional mine workers were hurt or missing inside the mine.

Miner Steve Smith was inside the mine at the time of the blast, but escaped with his life.

"Before you knew it, it was just like your ears stopped up, you couldn't hear and the next thing you know, it's just like you're right in the middle of a tornado," Smith told ABC's Good Morning America.

Endo said eyewitness reports suggested the blast "took you off your feet."

"In one account, this man was getting out of the mine taking his shirt off and he was watching his son, his nephew and older brother go in to work their shift," she told CTV's Canada AM from Marsh Fork, W.V., on Tuesday morning.

"The blast blew his shirt off and those three of his relatives, unfortunately, did not make it and were part of those who were identified. Those are the types of stories that we're hearing and we know that there are certainly more to come."



Jenny Waycaster waits for news of her son, Ken Lambert, following a mining accident near Montcoal, W.Va. Monday, April 5, 2010.

Among the dead were 62-year-old Benny R. Willingham, a 30-year miner who was only five weeks from retirement, said his sister-in-law, Sheila Prillaman. He was supposed to take a cruise with his wife next month.

Prillaman said the family learned of his death after seeing his name on a list of victims posted by the company.

Willingham's daughter, Michelle McKinney, heard about her father's death from a local official at a nearby school.

"They're supposed to be a big company," Willingham said. "These guys, they took a chance every day to work and make them big. And they couldn't even call us."

Diana Davis said she lost her husband, 51-year-old Timmy Davis, along with two of his nephews, 27-year-old Josh Napper and 20-year-old Cory Davis.

At an Easter prayer breakfast in Washington, U.S. President Barack Obama asked the audience to pray for the people who died in the tragic accident at the mine. He said the government will help the state with whatever it needs.

The U.S. Secretary of Labour, Hilda L. Solis, said the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration will "investigate this tragedy and take action."

"Miners should never have to sacrifice their lives for their livelihood," Solis said in a statement.

The blast at the Massey Energy Company-owned mine is believed to be the deadliest since a fire killed 27 people at the Emery Mining Corp.'s mine in Orangeville, Utah, in 1984.

In 1970, a blast at the Finley Coal Mine in Hyden, Kentucky, killed 38 people.

Massey Energy Company, the owner of the West Virginia mine, is a publicly traded company that owns 2.2 billion tons of coal reserves in the region.

Don Blakenship, the chairman and CEO of Massey Energy, offered his condolences to the miners through a statement that was released early Tuesday morning.

"Tonight we mourn the deaths of our members at Massey Energy," Blankenship said.

In the past year, the company was fined US\$382,000 for repeated serious violations involving its ventilation plan and equipment at the West Virginia mine where the blast occurred.

USA: NM mine worker trapped for 5 hours underground

Extract from NewsWest9.com

CARLSBAD, N.M. (AP) - A maintenance supervisor at Intrepid Potash near Carlsbad, New Mexico, was stuck for more than five hours in an underground elevator.

Potash officials would not identify the man by name, but says he was investigating a power outage at the company's east mine site Monday when the elevator, called a hoist, stopped.

Intrepid says the man was in the hoist for an extended period, but was in constant communication with officials above ground.

Company officials say the employee was in good spirits and was not injured.

The breakdown is being investigated. Officials say the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration also were on site throughout the day.

Wednesday 7 April 2010

NSW: Forums focus on mine safety

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The business and health ramifications of hazards in the mining industry are the focus of a series of workshops being held across central western New South Wales.

Industry and Investment NSW is hosting the seminars during the next seven months which will discuss health and fatigue management and musculoskeletal disorders.

The workshops in Orange, Dubbo, Cobar and Lithgow have been organised following the Wran Mine Safety Review.

The director of mine safety performance, John Flint, says the personal cost to staff and companies can be significant if it is not properly managed.

"Best practice occupational health and safety, which includes best practice health management, is one of the pathways to high productivity," he said.

"You cannot have a highly productive mine if you have poor health and safety."

Mr Flint says the issues are not just confined to the mining industry.

"They're a problem for general industry as well but they're specifically to address issues that have been identified as areas of need in the mining industry, not discounting that they are issues in other industries as well," he said.

USA: Mine Rescue Continues as Owner Faces Questions

Extract from the New York Times, USA

MONTCOAL, W.Va. — Rescue workers continued the precarious task early Wednesday of removing explosive methane gas from the coal mine where at least 25 miners died two days before, but they had not received any signs of life from the four people still missing.

The mine owner's dismal safety record, along with several recent evacuations of the mine, left federal officials and miners suggesting that Monday's explosion might have been preventable.

In the past two months, miners had been evacuated three times from the Upper Big Branch because of dangerously high methane levels, according to two miners who asked for anonymity for fear of losing their jobs. Representative Nick J. Rahall II, a Democrat whose district includes the mine, said he had received similar reports from miners about recent evacuations at the mine, which as recently as last month was fined at least three times for ventilation problems, according to federal records.

The Massey Energy Company, the biggest coal mining business in central Appalachia and the owner of the Upper Big Branch mine, has drawn

sharp scrutiny and fines from regulators over its safety and environmental record.

In 2008, one of its subsidiaries paid what federal prosecutors called the largest settlement in the history of the coal industry after pleading guilty to safety violations that contributed to the deaths of two miners in a fire in one of its mines. That year, Massey also paid a \$20 million fine — the largest of its kind levied by the Environmental Protection Agency — for clean water violations.

It is still unclear what caused Monday's blast, which is under investigation. But the disaster has raised new questions about Massey's attention to safety under the leadership of its pugnacious chief executive, Don L. Blankenship, and about why stricter federal laws, put into effect after a mining disaster in 2006, failed to prevent another tragedy.

Kevin Stricklin, an administrator with the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, said the magnitude of the explosion — the worst mining accident in 25 years, which also left four people missing, including a woman working as a mining operator — showed that "something went very wrong here."

"All explosions are preventable," Mr. Stricklin said. "It's just making sure you have things in place to keep one from occurring."

Mr. Rahall said that even veteran rescue workers, some with decades of experience, had told him they were shocked by what they saw inside the mine. They said they had never witnessed destruction on that scale, Mr. Rahall said, or dealt with the aftermath of an explosion of that magnitude.

"It turned rail lines into pretzels," Mr. Rahall said. "There seems like there was something awfully wrong to make such a huge explosion."

Gov. Joe Manchin III of West Virginia and members of Congress said state and federal officials would begin investigating the explosion.

In an interview with the Metronews radio network in West Virginia, Mr. Blankenship said

that despite the company's many violations, the Mine Safety and Health Administration would never have allowed the mine to operate if it had been unsafe.

"Violations are unfortunately a normal part of the mining process," Mr. Blankenship said.

"There are violations at every coal mine in America, and U.B.B. was a mine that had violations," he added, referring to Upper Big Branch.

"I think the fact that M.S.H.A., the state and our fire bosses and the best engineers that you can find were all in and around this mine, and all believed it to be safe in the circumstances it was in, speaks for itself as far as any suspicion that the mine was improperly operated," Mr. Blankenship said.

The Massey Energy Web site also contains a defense of the company's safety record. It says 2009 was the 17th year out of 20 that the company had scored above the industry average in safety.

But miners and other workers in the mine took issue with Mr. Blankenship's reassurances.

"No one will say this who works at that mine, but everyone knows that it has been dangerous for years," said Andrew Tyler, 22, an electrician who worked on the wiring for the coal conveyer belt as a subcontractor at the mine two years ago.

Mr. Tyler said workers had regularly been told to work 12-hour shifts when eight hours is the industry standard. He also said that live wires had been left exposed and that an accumulation of coal dust and methane was routinely ignored.

"I'm willing to go on record because I am a subcontractor who doesn't depend on Massey for my life," Mr. Tyler said.

In March alone, the Mine Safety and Health Administration cited the Upper Big Branch mine for 53 safety violations.

Last year, the number of citations issued against the mine more than doubled, to over 500, from

2008, and the penalties proposed against the mine more than tripled, to \$897,325.

J. Davitt McAteer, a former assistant director of the Mine Safety and Health Administration, said the Massey company "is certainly one of the worst in the industry" when it came to safety and called recent violations at the mine for substandard ventilation and other problems "cardinal sins."

"The Massey record is without doubt one of the most difficult in the industry from a safety standpoint," Mr. McAteer, now the vice president of Wheeling Jesuit University, said in an interview. He said other large, diversified coal operators had far better safety records than Massey.

In 2008, the Aracoma Coal Company, a subsidiary of Massey, agreed to pay \$4.2 million in criminal fines and civil penalties and to plead guilty to several safety violations related to a 2006 fire that killed two miners at a coal mine in Logan, W.Va.

After the fire broke out, the two miners found themselves unable to escape, partly because the company had removed some ventilation controls inside the mine. The workers died of suffocation. Federal prosecutors at the time called it the largest such settlement in the history of the coal industry.

The company's commitment to safety came under scrutiny in 2005 after Mr. Blankenship sent a memorandum to his deep mine superintendents.

"If any of you have been asked by your group presidents, your supervisors, engineers or anyone else to do anything other than run coal (i.e., build overcasts, do construction jobs, or whatever), you need to ignore them and run coal," said the memo, a copy of which was obtained from Bruce E. Stanley, a lawyer who represented the widows of the victims of the Aracoma mine fire. "This memo is necessary only because we seem not to understand that coal pays the bills."

In a follow-up memo a week later, Mr. Blankenship said some superintendents might have interpreted his first memo as implying that safety was a secondary consideration; in the second memo he called safety the company's "first responsibility."

In Washington on Tuesday during an Easter prayer breakfast, President Obama offered his condolences to the families of the victims and said the federal government was ready to help in whatever way needed.

Thirty-one miners were in the mine around 3 p.m. Monday when the explosion occurred. Some died from the explosion. Others suffocated from the fumes, state safety officials said. Seven of the bodies have been removed, and 14 have not yet been identified.

Four of the miners who were believed to have been farther back in the mine remained unaccounted for late Tuesday. Officials said there was still a possibility, though slim, that they had been able to reach airtight chambers, where there are stockpiles of food, water and oxygen.

Governor Manchin said at an afternoon news conference on Tuesday that four drills were in place to begin drilling holes behind the rescue chambers, an effort that began in earnest later in the day. It may not be until Wednesday night that rescue workers can regain entry to the mine after the first ventilation hole is drilled, he said.

"Everyone is going to cling on to the hope of that miracle," the governor said of the four missing miners. "The odds are against us. These are long odds. They know. These are mining families. They know methane, they know about air."

As the families of the miners waited on Tuesday, frustrations grew. State and mine officials were taking a long time to confirm the names of the dead, many of the miners said. Families also voiced frustration that they had learned about the disaster from news reports rather than from Massey officials.



Cindy Davis, the mother of deceased coal miner Cory Davis, is greeted by members of the community Wednesday, April 7, 2010 at a candlelight vigil in Cabin Creek, W.Va. Davis also lost a brother-in-law Timmy Davis Sr. and nephew Josh Napper who were among the 25 miners killed on Monday. (Photo: The Seattle Times)

Some of these tensions boiled over around 2 a.m. Tuesday when Mr. Blankenship arrived at the mine to announce the death toll to families who were gathered at the site. Escorted by at least a dozen state and other police officers, according to several witnesses, Mr. Blankenship prepared to address the crowd, but people yelled at him for caring more about profits than miners' lives.

After another Massey official informed the crowd of the new death toll, one miner threw a chair. A father and son stormed off screaming that they were quitting mining work. And several people yelled at Mr. Blankenship that he was to blame before he was escorted from the scene.

Quote of the week

"A man's dreams are an index to his greatness."

Zadok Rabinowitz,
(Polish rabbi, 1823-1900)

Death toll rises to 9 in N China coal mine flood as rescue efforts continue

Extract from Xinhua, China

XIANGNING, Shanxi, -- The death toll after a coal mine in north China's Shanxi Province flooded has risen to nine and 29 miners were still trapped as of 7 p.m. Wednesday, as rescue efforts continued.

Rescuers know the two areas the miners are trapped based on information from the accidents' survivors, Liu Dezheng, spokesman for the rescuers, said Wednesday.

Water levels in the two areas are still high with water still flowing into them, making the rescue work difficult, Liu added.

The shafts are also narrow, hampering the movement of rescuers and equipment into the areas, Liu said.

On Monday, rescuers pulled 115 miners out the mine alive, after they had been trapped for over a week.

No Chinese mine survivor in critical condition

Extract from Xinhua, China

TAIYUAN, -- None of the 115 Chinese mine survivors trapped underground for more than a week were in critical condition, after they were miraculously rescued on Monday, according to a doctor treating the miners in Taiyuan.

"None of the survivors were in intensive care, nor relying on breathing machines on Wednesday," said Liu Hong, head of intensive care in the No. 1 Hospital affiliated to the Shanxi Medical University in the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

One dead, 2 lost in coal mine fire in SW China

Extract from China Daily

KUNMING - One person was confirmed dead and another two missing after a coal dust fire Wednesday morning in southwestern China's Yunnan Province, according to local government.

The accident happened at around 11:00 a.m. at Chayuan Coal Mine in Niuji Town of Yiliang County, when 10 people were working underground.

Seven escaped unharmed. Rescue work is underway. The coal mine is a private one with an annual production capacity of 30,000 tonnes.

USA: Accident at Henderson County Mine

Extract from Tristatehomepage.com, USA

A Henderson mine worker has been seriously injured after officials say a car hit him underground.

The accident happened at the Freedom Mine in Henderson County around 10 Wednesday morning.

Authorities have not released the worker's name or current condition.

However, they did say he was coherent when he was taken to a hospital.

The Freedom Mine is not commenting on the accident.

Thursday 8 April 2010

U.S. Mine Official Surprised by Size of Massey Damage

Extract from US Business Week

.S. Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health Joseph A. Main said he's surprised by how large an area was affected by an explosion at Massey Energy Co.'s coal mine in West Virginia that killed 25 people.

The explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine spanned about 12,000 feet of shafts. Rescue efforts in the worst mining accident in 26 years have been slowed by dangerous levels of methane gas. Rescuers are drilling holes in an attempt to reduce the gas levels, Massey said today in a statement.

"We used to have these large areas when we had less control of methane and less control of coal dust," Main told reporters today near the scene of the explosion at Montcoal, West Virginia.

The April 5 mining accident was the worst since a fire killed 27 workers at the Wilberg complex in Utah in 1984, according to the U.S. Mine Rescue Association. Should four trapped miners die, the death toll would be the highest since

1970, when an explosion killed 38 miners in Kentucky.

"As soon as atmospheric conditions in the mine improve, mine rescue teams will re-enter the mine to continue the search for the four missing workers and recover and identify the bodies of the fourteen unidentified victims," Massey said in the statement.

Rescue Team

A 30-member rescue team is standing by to enter the mine when the methane levels drop, said Kevin Stricklin, U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration administrator. The team is divided into two groups of 15. The first group advances into the mine and the second holds back in case the rescuers need help.

Officials expect to make a decision later today about sending the rescue squad back into the mine tonight, West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin said at a press conference.

Aside from the high gas level in the operation, mines are so dark, even with the use of a flashlight, rescuers can get lost or turned around.

Stricklin said a team of searchers earlier made it to within 500 to 600 feet of a rescue chamber in the operation. Rescuers are tied with a lifeline and the distance to the chamber was too far, he said.

"Miners in West Virginia, and I think throughout the country, are taught to escape first," Ronald Wooten, director of the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training, said today.

Blast Investigation

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration formed a team of officials from outside the region that was charged with policing the mine today to investigate the explosion, it said in a statement.

Investigators will try to reconstruct the accident by measuring the force of the blast, debris

patterns, scorch marks, and by analyzing the dust on the roof, walls and floor.

The Upper Big Branch mine, located about 46 miles (74 kilometers) south of Charleston, is run by Performance Coal Co., a Massey unit. The non-union mine, which opened on Oct. 15, 1994, has had two fatalities in the past decade, a state Web site shows.

MSHA has issued more than \$900,000 in fines for the operation in the past year, according to federal data compiled by Bloomberg. Massey is appealing more than \$250,000 of the largest fines, among them one in January for ventilation systems that are supposed to prevent the buildup of methane gas and coal dust that can cause explosions.



Massey Fines

Of \$1.77 million in safety-related fines that the Mine Safety and Health Administration lodged against the Upper Big Branch mine since 2006, Massey has paid \$364,886, or 20 percent, according to agency data.

Congressman Nick Rahall, a West Virginia Democrat, said miners have come over the last 18 months to two years to tell him that "something is fishy about Massey" and that while they didn't specifically point to any mines, they did speak about high methane levels and difficulties with coal dust.

He said he didn't bring the topics up in conversations with Massey Chief Executive

Officer Donald Blankenship because he didn't have specifics.

Massey fell \$3.23, or 6.7 percent, to \$45.22 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading. The shares have tumbled 17 percent over the past two days.

WA: Mesh invention promises better mine safety

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The University of Western Australia (UWA) says its latest mining technology invention could improve safety conditions for miners around the world.

A high energy absorbing mesh is made of recycled scrap metal and is designed to act as a barrier to protect miners from underground rock blasts.

UWA will now collaborate with a company specialising in mining technology to market the product.

Inventor and university professor Yves Potvin says the technology could protect miners working in tough conditions in the Goldfields and Pilbara.

"In these conditions the normal ground support usually fails and that's how you get people getting injured or fatalities due to rock bursts," he said.

"So this new system, because it's stronger than normal mesh, would have a better chance to sustain these natural explosions."

Friday 9 April 2010

USA: Accidents Are Not Inevitable

Blog extracted from The New York Times, USA



Beverly A. Sauer is a professor at the Georgetown University McDonough School of Business. She is the author of "The Rhetoric of Risk: Technical Documentation in Hazardous Environments."

As West Virginia's governor articulated, the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine reminds us of the extreme hazards that miners face in supplying the nation's energy needs at an affordable price.

How automation and other technical advances may worsen safety risks, not reduce them.

In acknowledging this risk, we must remember the principal lesson of the 2006 Sago mine disaster, which killed 12 workers: that mine accidents need not necessarily become human tragedies.

Mine disasters seem inevitable because they are dramatic and all-too-frequent reminders of the dangerous and uncertain conditions in which miners work. This most deadly disaster should remind us, however, not to overthrow common sense mining practices as we design new technologies to improve mine safety.

In hindsight, the history of violations at the Upper Big Branch Mine provided unheeded signals that the mine was at risk. The mine had a history of roof falls and problems with ventilation and dust — the chief ingredients of a mine explosion. Roof falls did not cause the disaster, but roof falls may precipitate disaster directly when they crush miners under unprotected roof.

They also disrupt ventilation pathways in the system and block exits in a disaster. Sparks created by the falling roof can ignite pockets of methane, and falling roof increases explosive dust levels.

The mine's longwall mining system and automated controls were designed to reduce the number of miners directly at risk. Unfortunately, these systems are often highly unreliable indicators of what is really happening underground. At Sago, for example, automated carbon monoxide alarms could not distinguish diesel exhaust from a real mine fire. When an alarm sounded, workers in the control room called miners underground to determine the cause of the alarm. When the explosion

occurred, all alarms sounded at once, but the alarms were too late to save miners' lives.

Automated mining systems may also circumvent hard-won safety regulations and common-sense mining precepts. Previously, for example, conveyor belts in ventilation shafts were not permissible — for good reason.

Conveyor belts carrying coal to the surface produce potentially explosive dust. The friction of rubber belts also creates a fire hazard. Ventilation moves clean air from the surface downward into the mine. In a belt fire, the ventilation feeds the fire, and miners are potentially trapped inside the mine. In the 2006 Aracoma Alma Mine accident — two weeks after Sago, two miners died when a belt fire produced thick black smoke in the ventilation shaft that was supposed to provide a fresh-air escapeway — despite automated warning systems.

As the Upper Big Branch mine disaster demonstrates, disasters are costly in human lives, first and foremost, but also in recovery costs and in their emotional and economic impact on the surrounding community. After the recovery, the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the West Virginia Department of Mines will determine the technical cause of the disaster.

In speculating about the cause of the disaster, we are reminded — again in hindsight — that such loss need not be inevitable.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

T

tribute/tributing A contract under which a party of miners working on their own account ('tributers') gave the mine owner a proportion of all the metal they mined. Often found in mines where the owner has ceased viable company operations, but where mineral can still be won.

-Ed