



Mining Accident News No.1012

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Saturday 17 April 2010

USA: Serious problems found at Massey mines since blast

Extract from Associated Press, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Federal inspectors have found more than 60 serious safety violations at Massey Energy operations since the explosion that killed 29 miners, adding to fallout from the disaster that includes a wrongful death lawsuit by one of the men's widows.

Inspectors visited more than 30 underground Massey coal mines in West Virginia, Kentucky and Virginia after the April 5 blast, according to records from the Mine Safety and Health Administration. The agency has tentatively blamed preventable accumulations of explosive methane gas and coal dust for the worst U.S. coal mining disaster since 1970.

The miner's widow accuses the company of a history of safety violations that amount to negligence in the first wrongful death lawsuit over the explosion, which she filed Thursday.

Investigators were reviewing records from the site of the blast and waiting for dangerous gases to be ventilated before going underground at the Upper Big Branch mine. It will probably be another week until investigators can safely go in, MSHA Administrator Kevin Stricklin said.

To tally violations at other Massey sites, The Associated Press checked inspection records for all of the company's approximately 70 underground coal mines in the U.S. from April 5 through Thursday. Mines operated by other companies also were inspected during the same period.

Stricklin said the MSHA hasn't been disproportionately targeting Massey since the blast, nor has it increased the pace of inspections. He did say inspectors have responded to hazard complaints at two Massey mines.

"We're just going about our regular business," Stricklin said. "I didn't give any instructions to go and look at Massey mines."

Still, Stricklin sharply criticized the company for violations found in the last 10 days.

The violations include conveyor belt problems at Massey's Aracoma Alma No. 1 mine in West Virginia, where a belt fire killed two men in 2006.

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

"I'm very disappointed," Stricklin said. "You would think that personnel associated with Massey would be really more careful."

The company's Solid Energy No. 1 mine in Kentucky was cited for allowing coal dust to pile up on three occasions since the explosion.

"That's very troubling," Stricklin said. "Pitiful."

Mines are required to keep methane well below explosive levels with sophisticated ventilation systems and control coal dust by keeping it from piling up and covering it with noncombustible material.

Stricklin has told district managers to look more closely at all mine ventilation systems and the buildup of methane, and to move rock dusting surveys to the front end of the quarterly inspection.

Stricklin said he was embarrassed the industry wasn't able to prevent the Upper Big Branch tragedy.

"An explosion of this magnitude basically sends us back 40 years. All explosions are preventable," he said.

Massey is facing its first wrongful death lawsuit over the blast, filed by Marlene Griffith in Raleigh County Circuit Court. The lawsuit also targets Performance Coal, the Massey subsidiary that operated the underground mine.

The lawsuit claims Massey's handling of working conditions at the mine, plus its history of safety violations, amounted to aggravated conduct that rises above the level of ordinary negligence.

Griffith and her husband, William Griffith, were planning to celebrate their 33rd wedding anniversary April 30, the lawsuit said.

Mark Moreland, a Charleston lawyer representing Griffith, said that William Griffith was concerned about safety in the mine and had avoided serious injury during a rock fall there a week before his death.

"He told his wife on more than one occasion that if anything happened to him in that mine, that

she needed to get a lawyer," Moreland said Friday.

Massey did not immediately respond to requests for comment Friday on the lawsuits or the violations.

The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training started its own safety sweep of the state's nearly 200 underground mines Friday. Administrator Terry Farley declined to say whether the agency is targeting Massey.

MSHA issued the recent citations while conducting spot checks and routine inspections at the Massey operations.

Agency records show the problems were not universal; several Massey mines weren't cited at all after the inspections.

Among those that came up clean is Massey's Tiller No. 1 mine in Virginia. Federal inspectors had warned Massey to improve safety at the mine last fall or face heightened enforcement for a pattern of serious violations.

President Barack Obama has ordered a sweeping review of coal mines with poor safety records and called for stronger mining laws.

Mines in West Virginia were asked to stop producing coal Friday and concentrate on safety in memory of the Upper Big Branch victims.

USA: Independent team will review MSHA's record of W.Va. mine explosion

Extract from Washington Post, USA

The Labor Department will establish an independent team of safety experts to evaluate the Mine Safety and Health Administration's internal review of the April 5 explosion at a West Virginia coal mine that killed 29 workers, officials said Friday.

The establishment of the independent evaluation follows criticism of MSHA's own internal review team, which is being led by Norman Page, a veteran agency employee who oversaw inspections in a district where a similar explosion

occurred in 2006. After that blast, an MSHA review sharply criticized the district's oversight efforts, saying they "permitted poor performance to continue uncorrected at all levels."

After the blast this month, industry experts and former regulators also questioned whether the agency's own team could objectively judge their colleagues.

Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis on Friday asked John Howard, the director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, to lead the independent analysis of MSHA's review and to identify people with the appropriate experience to serve on his team. Howard, a physician, coordinated programs monitoring the effects of the Sept. 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks on people in the area.

MSHA is part of the Labor Department. NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under the Health and Human Services Department.

Both the MSHA internal review of the explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine and the independent analysis of that review will be made public, the Labor Department said Friday.

"I am confident that MSHA will conduct a thorough and complete review of the actions of the mine operator and its own actions at the Upper Big Branch mine," Solis said in a statement. "To ensure accountability, I've asked for an outside team to review the policy, process and substance of MSHA's internal review. This independent evaluation will help ensure that we're doing everything we can to protect the health and safety of America's miners."

Monday 19 April 2010

USA: Obama, Biden Will Attend Miners' Memorial

Extract from New York Times (blog), USA

President Obama and Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. will travel to West Virginia this weekend to mourn the 29 miners killed in an

explosion earlier this month in the worst mining accident in the United States in four decades, the White House announced Monday.

Mr. Obama "will deliver a eulogy honoring the lives of those who perished and offering his deepest condolences to the loved ones they left behind," Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, said in a statement sent to reporters.

The memorial service in Beckley will be the latest event where the president acts as the nation's chief mourner in a moment of catastrophe. He likewise spoke at a service last November honoring 13 active and retired soldiers killed at Fort Hood in Texas by an Army psychiatrist who had been communicating with a radical Islamic cleric in Yemen.

Mr. Obama took a tough stand last week against both the company that operates the Upper Big Branch mine where the workers died in the April 5 blast and the federal regulatory system that oversees the industry. Speaking in the Rose Garden, the president blamed the deadly disaster on "a failure first and foremost of management but also a failure of oversight and a failure of laws so riddled with loopholes that they allow unsafe conditions to continue."

In response to reports of safety violations at Upper Big Branch, Mr. Obama ordered a new review of mine safety. The company that operates the mine, Massey Energy Company, responded that the president had been "misinformed about our record and the mining industry in general" and said that some "are rushing to judgment for political gain or to avoid blame."

Tuesday 20 April 2010

America's dark history of coal

Miners have clashed, sometimes violently, with owners. Will it be deja vu in West Virginia?

Watching the events unfold around Massey Energy Co.'s Upper Big Branch coal mine the last few weeks created an uneasy sense of deja

vu. And it had less to do with 29 miners' bodies below ground than with power plays and corporate hubris above it.

The deadly West Virginia mine explosion came four days after the 100th anniversary of the start of a lengthy Colorado coal strike that eventually led to open guerrilla warfare between miners and the Colorado National Guard. The nadir of that showdown was what came to be called the Ludlow Massacre when, at the end of a daylong gun battle on April 20, 1914, National Guardsmen torched a strikers' tent colony where 11 children and four mothers were hiding in a large pit beneath the wooden floor of one of the tents. All but two of the mothers perished.

Few people these days have heard of the Ludlow Massacre. Fewer still know about the circumstances in which it occurred. In the face of abject regulatory failure, at least 75 people were killed over a seven-month period during the strike, as several thousand coal miners openly rebelled against a corrupt local political and economic system.

West Virginia has its own history of violent mining confrontations, including the 1921 march on Blair Mountain when 13,000 armed miners faced off against mine guards, local militia and government troops. Sixteen men, most of them miners, were killed before the U.S. government sent in one of its newest weapons — planes — to intimidate the miners into retreating. It worked.

But there had been no defusing the conflict in Colorado, where the mine owners — led by the Rockefellers' Colorado Fuel & Iron Co. — were so powerful that they effectively created their own laws, stole elections at will and installed mine superintendents to rule small fiefdoms enforced by hired thugs.

As if short-circuiting democracy wasn't bad enough, the coal operators ignored government safety regulations, considering them an intrusion on their right to make a profit. In the eyes of the Rockefellers' man in Colorado, Lamont

Montgomery Bowers, the miners had a simple choice: Work under the operators' terms or find another job, safety be damned.

Don Blankenship, who runs Massey Energy, would have fit right in among those Colorado coal barons. Media reports have detailed Blankenship's efforts to dominate state politics, including trying to stack the state Supreme Court as it was considering cases involving Massey.

Other media reports have detailed widespread safety violations at Massey mines. In one internal memo, Blankenship warned mine managers that they were to ignore any directive "to do anything other than run coal. ... This memo is necessary only because we seem not to understand that the coal pays the bills."

Bowers would have been proud.

The Colorado strike began in the northern mines on April 1, 1910. After it faltered, the United Mine Workers expanded the strike in September 1913 to southern Colorado, covering the eastern foothills of the Rockies. Most of the miners' demands were already required under Colorado law, including that they be paid for "dead work" they had been doing for free — namely, shoring up mine roofs with timbers so they wouldn't collapse and kill them.

"The companies created a condition which they considered satisfactory to themselves, and ought to be to the workmen, and jammed the workmen into it, and thought they were philanthropists," Ethelbert B. Stewart, a top investigator for the new Department of Labor, wrote at the time. "That men have rebelled grows out of the fact that they are men."

The expanded strike was a nasty, brutal affair, and after a series of attacks and murders on both sides, Gov. Elias M. Ammons sent in the National Guard as peacekeepers. At the same time, state budget problems began delaying paychecks, which led many of the Guardsmen to walk away. The hated private mine guards took their places, and the peacekeepers morphed into the miners' enemy.

Then came the deaths at Ludlow on April 20, 1914. Over the next 10 days, amid a national union "call to arms," thousands of marauding miners and their supporters went on a rampage of retribution. At least 30 people were killed as the makeshift guerrilla army seized control of 275 miles of the Colorado Front Range.

Unable to stem the insurrection, Ammons sought help from President Woodrow Wilson, who sent in the Army to supplant the National Guard. The miners, with their immediate enemy gone, laid down their arms on May 1, and the fighting was over, with the miners winning the war but losing. It would take another 13 years and the Wobblies to gain union recognition there.

Yet much of the political and economic oppression in the region ended. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, a little revolution wasn't a bad thing for the miners of Colorado. Let's hope it doesn't take the same kind of action to redress the very deep grievances in West Virginia.

Scott Martelle is the author of "Blood Passion: The Ludlow Massacre and Class War in the American West."

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Seven trapped in flooded coal mine in east China

Extract from Xinhua, China

NANCHANG -- Seven workers were believed trapped underground a flooded coal mine in east China's Jiangxi Province Tuesday, a local work safety official said.

The accident occurred at about midday in a pit in Jinshan town in Shangli county, said the official in Shangli, who declined to be named.

The trapped miners still had a good chance of survival, he said.

Further details are not immediately known.

In a separate coal mine accident, five miners died and seven are trapped after a gas leak in Jianshan town in Gaoan city in Jiangxi early

Tuesday. Rescuers said the chances of survival were slim because of the gas accumulation in the shaft.

This week in mining accident history

22 April 1805

Hurlet Colliery

Renfrewshire, Scotland, UK

Underground Coal Mine

Methane explosion

18 killed

Source: www.scottishmining.co.uk

A most dreadful accident happened on Monday morning, at the Hurlet coal work, near Paisley. About nine o'clock, while the men were at work, the inflammable air in the pit took fire. Four men were blown from the bottom of the pit into the air, their bodies torn in pieces, and the mangled parts scattered about in all directions. One of them was found at the distance of 300 yards from the mouth of the pit. There is every reason to fear that other thirteen, who were below, have all been killed. The father of one of the sufferers went down, in the hope of saving them, but was instantly suffocated by the foul air. A horse at the mouth of the pit was killed, and the whole machinery blown to atoms. [Caledonian Mercury 25 April 1805]

We are sorry to learn, that the thirteen colliers stated in our last to have been in the pit at Hurlet, when the explosion took place, have been all found dead. A subscription has been begun in Glasgow, for the relief of the families of the unfortunate sufferers. [Caledonian Mercury 27 April 1805]

The following burials are listed under April 22 1805 in OPR Abbey Parish (final figure is mortcloth money):

George Scot, Hurlet, Age 35, 3s 10d

John Gibie, Hurlet, Age 60, 2s 10d

Andrew son to John Gibie, Hurlet, Age 22, 1s 6d

John son to Andrew Gibbie, Hurlet, Age 25, 5s 10d

(illegible) Paton, son, Hurlet, Age 12, 0s 4d

(illegible) Morison, son, Hurlet, Age 13, 1s 4d

Wednesday 21 April 2010

USA: West Virginia Proposes New Mine-Safety Rules

Extract from the Wall Street Journal, USA

The West Virginia Board of Coal Mine Safety and Health will issue new proposed regulations intended to make the state's mines safer following the explosion this month at a Massey Energy Co. mine that killed 29 miners.

The board will propose three rules aimed at improving maps, evacuations and drills related to mine fires, two rules adding requirements for mine rescue teams and a rule mandating that each mine office has a barometer to monitor air pressure changes that can affect methane concentrations inside mines. Another rule would require that methane monitors on machines be tested and calibrated every 15 days.

Methane, an explosive gas that occurs naturally in coal seams, was believed to have played a role in this month's fatal explosion.

Joel Watts, health and safety administrator for the board, said the rules will be officially proposed Thursday morning when he delivers a draft to West Virginia's secretary of state. That action will begin a 30-day public comment period, before the board will respond to those comments.

Mr. Watts declined to say if the new rules are a direct result of the April 5 accident at Massey's Upper Big Branch mine in Mont coal, W.Va., or any preliminary findings by investigators. "I cannot say one way or the other because the investigation is still ongoing," he said.

Federal mine-safety officials have said that the massive explosion at the mine was likely caused by an accumulation of methane gas and could have been made more severe by coal dust. At one point during the rescue efforts, mine rescue teams had to be withdrawn from the mine when methane levels increased as a weather front approached and barometric pressure dropped.

The six-member board is made up of three industry representatives and three union representatives, all appointed by the West Virginia governor. The board is charged with making sure the state's coal mining health and safety regulations are effective. The board can write new rules, or alter or eliminate others.

Meanwhile, federal mine-safety regulators said Wednesday they began an "inspection blitz" over the weekend focusing on 57 underground coal mines with a history of problems involving ventilation and methane accumulation, among other things.

More than 275 Mine Safety and Health Administration coal-mine enforcement personnel were sent to the mines, more than half of which were located in West Virginia and Kentucky, the agency said. The agency said results of the inspections would be made public as they become available.

MSHA began the review after the explosion at Massey's Upper Big Branch mine.

"The purpose of these inspections is to provide assurance that no imminent dangers, explosions, hazards or other serious health or safety conditions and practices are present at these mines," Joe Main, the head of MSHA, said in a statement. "Just last week, we pledged to the president that we will do whatever it takes to make sure another tragedy like the one that claimed 29 miners' lives at Upper Big Branch never happens again."

Of the 57 mines subject to the inspections, nine are owned by Massey. Five are owned by Consol Energy Inc. Another five are owned by Patriot Coal Corp., while three are owned by Peabody Energy Corp. and two by Alpha Natural Resources LLC. Most of the remaining mines are owned by privately held companies.

Seven miners rescued after coal mine flooding in east China

Extract from Xinhua, China

Nanchang -- Seven miners who had been trapped underground after a coal mine flooding in eastern China's Jiangxi Province were all rescued early Wednesday morning, according to local government.

The accident occurred at about midday Tuesday in a pit in Jinshan Town in Shangli County, when nine workers were working underground. Two of them escaped unharmed and the others were trapped.

Rescuers employed seven pumps to pump water out of the pit, and managed to rescue the trapped miners at around 1:00 a.m. Wednesday.

Quote of the week



"Life is too important to take seriously."

Corky Siegel
(US Blues musician, 1943-)

China's CCTV Suspected of Staging Mine Rescue

Extract from Before Its News

The rescue of 115 trapped miners from a flooded mine in China's Shanxi Province has been hailed as a "miracle" by Chinese media. However, speculation has been rampant on the Internet that some officials may have staged this "hugely successful" rescue operation.

In addition, authorities still have not released a complete name list of survivors, leaving many miners' families wondering who those 115 survivors are.

Chinese authorities reported on April 12 that 35 workers were found dead in the unfinished flooded Wangjialing Coal Mine with three still

missing. Most world media reported quotes from Xinhua, China's official media agency and mouthpiece of the Chinese regime. Reuters wrote in an April 6 report, "The high number of survivors was rare good news for China's perilous mining industry, the deadliest in the world with thousands killed every year. ..."

Cover-ups Common

Cover-ups and media control by the Chinese communist regime are common practice during and after disasters and other public incidents which might prompt questions regarding the competence of government officials. Because this mine disaster affected high officials, such as the governor of Shanxi Province and the State Administration for Safety Supervision, speculation has been widespread online that some officials may have directed or staged this rescue operation.

Radio France Internationale published an article on April 7 titled: "Foreign Media Accuse China Central Television (CCTV) of Staging the Wangjialing Rescue Operation." It stated that Melissak Chan, a correspondent for the Arabic-language news network Al Jazeera, was on site at the Wangjialing Mine on April 5, reporting on the mine rescue operation.

In a Twitter, Chan wrote that the disaster site was so heavily guarded, it was impossible for anyone to get near it. At noon on April 5, when CCTV was filming live, they asked the rescue team to pose as the background. The rescue team entered the mine, and CCTV then filmed a scene of them exiting the mine.

Melissak's messages were echoed by a Chinese blogger, a "senior engineer," who has allegedly been working in the mining industry for over 20 years and has led rescue teams in a number of mine disasters. He wrote an online blog questioning the authenticity of the Wangjialing mine rescue operation and its reporting by CCTV.

In his blogs, the "senior engineer" brings up a number of suspicious observations, the most

glaring one being that all of the rescued miners were clean-shaven when they were brought out from the pit.

“Growing beards is a natural physiological phenomenon for those miners, and no one can escape it. However, the rescued miners were clean-shaven. How can they not have grown beards in close to 10 days?” he asked.

“Everyone take notice: the rescued miners were carried out directly from the pit; they had not been cleaned up nor shaven. When the rescue team returned to the surface, they were not only quite clean; they weren't even perspiring.”

He also pointed out, “This was a flood disaster, and many days passed; the flooded shaft was wet and muddy, yet the clothing of rescuers who lifted the trapped miners to the surface remained bright and clean. Did they just ‘pose’ for it?”

He said that Chinese media reported that 120 hours after the accident took place, life was discovered in the flooded shaft, and rescue teams sent down 360 packages of nutrient solution as well as two letters, pens, paper, and phones. He found this highly suspect, saying that, according to his experience, China's rescue technology has not yet reached the level of expertise to deliver relief items to a specific designated location, and China has never reached this level of success in rescues before. He thus seriously suspected the validity of the rescue operation.

Preventing ‘a Fuss’

It appears that the miraculous rescue of the 115 trapped miners was seen as a publicity opportunity by government officials and the Chinese Communist Party to make themselves look good, and the actual unpleasant details and facts as they unfolded, as well as the concerns of family members, were edited out of the story.

Family members of these workers have been placed in different hotels in the Shanxi areas as far as 43.5 miles away from the coal mine to prevent them from “making a fuss.”

Internet reports say that 500 policemen are posted at the Wangjialing Coal Mine. Mr. Niu, a resident of Xiangning County, where the coal mine is located, confirmed to a reporter from New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) that hundreds of policemen were guarding the mine.

An insurance agent also told the NTDTV reporter that the site of the coal mine was closely guarded, and authorities have blocked any news from the public. He said, “They didn't let us enter even when we paid money. We stayed on the outer edge of the mine for two days and then came back.”

The official report claims that the second batch of miners rescued consisted of 106 people, and that most were taken to Hejin People's Hospital. However, CCTV live reports only showed the 30 or so miners who were brought to Shanxi Aluminum Factory Hospital, a small and not well-equipped hospital.

'Stability Preservation'

Further speculation and suspicion of a cover-up arose when China National Coal Group Corp., the state-owned company that hired the miners, announced on April 8 that the company had established a workforce of 2,000 to conduct an aftermath “stability preservation” operation. The workforce was divided into 153 teams and each team is responsible for counseling one miner's family. The announcement also indicated that members of the “stability preservation” team will live with miners' families to “take care of their needs” until they return to their hometowns.

An NTDTV commentator suggested that, rather than counseling the miners' families, the stability preservation team's role is to monitor miners' families and prevent them from leaking information to the outside world.

One blogger stated that authorities' dispatching such massive manpower for a “stability preservation” operation after claiming that they had accomplished the world's most miraculous rescue mission only reflects that authorities are trying desperately to cover something up.

As has been the case during other disasters in China, it will be very difficult for anyone to independently verify the actual circumstances or the number of miners involved in the tragedy, as it is the Chinese government alone who controls what the public gets to hear and see.

Thursday 22 April 2010

WA: A new approach: will it save lives?

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

When 45 year old Wayne Ross plunged almost twenty metres down a dark hole deep inside the BHP's Leinster nickel mine, he became the ninth mining worker since June 2008 for whom a day on the job became a death sentence.

His life ended when his bogger, an underground mining version of a front end loader, tumbled into a dug out section of the mine one Sunday earlier this month.

Rescue teams recovered his body in the early hours of the following morning but it's still not clear how the accident happened....or why.

Three separate investigations, by the Department of Mines and Petroleum, WA Police and BHP Billiton, are under way but won't report for some time, perhaps months.

But, the impact of the accident was immediate.

There were calls for a fresh inquiry into mining safety. There were demands for a more rapid overhaul of the state's safety regulatory system. Something had to be done. Someone had to be held to account.

The Minister for Mines and Petroleum Norman Moore held urgent meetings with BHP Billiton and expressed his deep concern at continuing safety problems and yet another tragic death.

But, he offered this assurance - help was on the way.

The State Government was already introducing sweeping changes that would forever alter the face of mining safety. By focusing on hazards and risks rather than regulations and

compliance, mining companies would be compelled to improve safety or face the consequences.

But the question remains - will it work?

Levy

The new system will charge companies a fee of up to \$250 a worker, raising an estimated \$8 million this financial year and up to 35 million dollars each subsequent year.

It's the first time the State Government is introducing a "user-pays" safety system, already in place in New South Wales and Queensland, where the mining industry will be funding those regulating the safety of their operations.

The levy will allow the Department of Mines and Petroleum to double the number of mine safety inspectors by adding an extra 37 inspectors to its ranks.

The Mines Minister Norman Moore says that is only the beginning.

"Beyond that, it could be another 30 or so inspectors employed as well so we're looking at well and truly more than doubling the number of inspectors as the revenue from the levy starts to become available to the government to spend in this area."

Overseeing the safety changes will be the department's Resources Safety Division in a program called RADARS.

RADARS has three key elements - capacity, competency and legislation.

Capacity means more mines inspectors, competency means inspectors with the right experience and qualifications, and legislation will deliver new rules requiring a risk management approach.

Culture

While the number of inspectors may double or triple, the attitude on the ground also needs changing.

Callers to Geoff Hutchison's Morning Program on ABC Local Radio raised questions about the commitment of resource companies to safety.

Callers claimed the inevitable tension between production and safety was continually tipped in favour of commercial considerations.

One said contractors were reluctant to raise issues of safety for fear of compromising their key performance indicators.

Another man, who said he was a worker with 28 years experience with a large mining company, described a culture of intimidation.

"I'm aware there are quite a few people that are scared to raise safety concerns. They'll lose their bonus or their performance appraisal.

"If you do raise a serious safety concern, with my company, you get hammered. I've been taken off shift twice. You need to be a QC to defend yourself," he said.

Others claimed safety was continually threatened by long working hours, convoluted working procedures, and production pressures.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union says the feedback from its members suggests there is a broad problem with the safety culture of the resources sector.

Union State Secretary Steve McCartney says intimidation is an issue.

"Some people feel intimidated about coming forward with safety issues because generally the issues you have to take up to your supervisor or your manager once removed and he's the same guy who regulates your increases and also does your individual assessments."

"Most of the members and workers that we've talked to in the mining industry said they'd come forward and have something to say if it was kept anonymous. And I think that the simple fact that they want it kept anonymous tells us that they believe there's a level of intimidation there. So they'd be perceived as a troublemaker."

While specific claims of intimidation have yet to be verified, they prompted a strong response from Mr Moore who said any harassment was unacceptable.

"I'd be very distressed if that is in fact what is happening. The bottom line in respect to safety is that you need to have your employees working with employers with the same intention in mind. Both groups must have the same desire to provide and achieve safe workplaces.

"If there is intimidation, then I'd like to know about it and anybody who wants to come and see me and to explain an intimidatory situation then I'd love to hear it. One of the problems over time has been that some unions have used safety issues as an industrial relations issue and that can sometimes muddy the waters over what is accurate and what is not."

Risk management

Apart from introducing a levy, the government is introducing a risk-based management approach to improving safety in the resources sector.

It will move away from a prescriptive regulatory approach which specifies in detail what mining operators must do keep their workers and contractors safe.

Instead, it will set safety standards and then measure safety performance.

This risk-based approach reflects the findings of the Kenner Report and other recent inquiries which recommended a sophisticated, multilayered strategy to dealing with safety threats.

Solving safety problems is a complex undertaking.

When someone dies in the mining sector, the instinct of most people, the public, politicians and the media, is to call for someone's head.

But, finding someone to blame and finding solutions to safety problems are two different things, and an obsessive focus on the former

can obscure the complex challenges of the latter.

The risk-based approach is influenced by the work of Professor James Reason from the United Kingdom.

An internationally-regarded safety expert, his work on organisational safety has been widely applied in areas from aviation and emergency medicine to railways and the resources industry.

His famous "Swiss-cheese" model depicts how accidents are caused by holes in an organisation's safety defences.

At the organisational level, the holes are known as "Latent Conditions" - long term problems that often remain hidden for years. The next level is known as "Local Conditions", things which may contribute to an accident like time pressure or inadequate equipment. The final level at the sharp end of day-to-day operations is called "Active Failures". These are the errors by individuals or groups that finally trigger an accident.

The complex part of applying Reason's approach is this - sometimes an organisation may have many holes and not have an accident.

Other times, a couple of holes in an otherwise safety-conscious organisation may cause multiple fatalities.

The presence or absence of accidents is not, in itself, a reliable indicator of safety. Some organisations can operate with poor safety systems for years and kill no one. Others, like BHP Billiton, can have highly evolved systems yet still their employees or contractors die.

As Professor Reason once remarked, luck favours the deserving and the undeserving equally.

It's that systems safety thinking that is shaping the new WA strategy which uses comprehensive risk management as the key to improving safety by finding and plugging these holes before they cause an accident.

Pro-active

The State Mining Engineer Simon Ridge, says the new regime aims to deliver this pro-active approach.

Mr Ridge says the new approach will stretch across the industry state-wide at a range of levels from the shop floor to the boardroom, and will include education, audits and enforcement to address safety issues.

"The modern way of thinking is that you don't actually tell people how to achieve the outcome.

"You define the outcome and then as a regulator you monitor their progress to that outcome and the efficiency of the tools and the management systems that they put in place."

Mr Ridge says given the range and scale of resource operations across the state, companies need the flexibility to select the right method to manage risks.

"We need to allow industry to find the best mechanism to establish this 'as-low-as-reasonably-achievable' level of risk for their employees and people involved and then we need to go out and monitor what they're doing to make sure they're achieving it.

"So, it's a case of one size doesn't fit all, we need to be a lot smarter in how we apply our resources."

While locations and circumstances of the recent spate of deaths have been varied, Mr Ridge sees a common thread.

"These events have been varied. There does not necessarily seem to be any line of continuity between them but they do point to a systemic problem. And, at the end of the day, what we need is an empowered workforce that has the ability to make the right decision in all situations."

Long road

The pace of reform, so far at least, has not been swift.

Norman Moore said last September that in the first six months this year there would be \$8 million available to fund an extra 37 positions.

But, there are no extra inspectors at this point and the government has yet to collect a single dollar from its safety levy.

Simon Ridge says comprehensive change take time.

"Certainly, it's not going quick enough for anybody. We'd all like it to go quicker but we do have to do the groundwork. We have to put the foundation in."

Mr Moore told the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, as the funds from the levy roll in, the changes, including the new inspectors, will roll out.

"The changes are expected to take two to three years to be fully implemented. However, significant changes will be occurring and will be reported on as each stage is implemented."

"I'm very pleased that they (industry) have accepted the fact that they will be paying for mine safety through a cost recovery system and I'm very pleased that they recognise, very clearly recognise, that this is an issue that has to be addressed and they are coming along with the government to address it."

On that point, there appears to be no disagreement.

The industry, in general, has accepted that safety needs to improve but it seems less pleased at the prospect of paying for it.

"We don't necessarily like that but we've chosen to focus on ensuring that given there will be a levy, how do we make sure this is linked to major reform and most importantly how can ensure its linked to improvements in safety," says the Director with the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, Nicole Roocke.

Industry's goal, she says, it to see that its money well spent and that companies and workers will get value for their safety dollar.

"We're certainly very concerned at how that levy will be utilised but the focus should not be on how much the levy is, nor on the number of inspectors, but on how can we do things differently and how can that levy be used to make sure that people who work in our industry go home safe at the end of the day."

But, what will be the measure of success?

In an industry where hazards and risks abound, it's a blinding glimpse of the obvious to say no one can guarantee safety, or that the regulators ultimate goal of "zero harm" can be achieved quickly or easily, if at all.

Accidents will happen, people will be injured and killed. The goal will be to minimise that toll of injury and death.

The difficulty for the regulator is that it will have to improve safety significantly just to hold the line due to an expanding workforce.

A static accident rate means that with an expanding workforce, the number of deaths and injuries will continue to climb.

The rate must be driven down just to hold the number of fatalities and injuries at current levels.

Simon Ridge understands that the challenge is formidable.

"You're right, as you increase your numbers if you maintain your frequency rate, with more numbers you're going to have more incidents.

So, to get that next step change, and again move to the vision of zero harm, we've got to make changes and the things we are doing are aimed and making those changes," he says.

Critical challenge

The critical question remains whether the new system will save a single life or prevent a single accident.

When asked if he believed the proposed system would have stopped any one of the deaths in the last 18 months, Mr Moore has this response:

"I don't want to speculate about that all I know is that the new way of doing business is a new way of looking at safety on mine sites. It's about identifying risks. It's about putting in place mechanisms and processes that mitigate against those risks."

One of the risks the State Mining Engineer will have to manage is whether there is the political will and public patience to give the new system time to work, particularly if more fatalities occur.

Mr Ridge has no illusions about the difficulties of the task ahead.

"It's not a small job and it's certainly not going to be easy. As the minister said, it's going to take some time. And at the end of the day it won't be a case of a bunch of bureaucrats sitting in an office sitting in Perth with a pen and paper in their hand ticking boxes. It'll be people on the ground, in the regions and at the coalface."

If the reform process stays on schedule and on budget, if the promised inspectors are on the job, and if the new regulatory regime encourages or compels companies to better manage their hazards and risks, the State Government, department and industry will have delivered on reforms recommended by inquiry after inquiry for almost a decade.

But, the final test will be the results - whether workers keep dying on the job.

WA: Push to deliver mining safety

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The State Mining Engineer believes the government's push to dramatically improve the safety performance of the resources sector will deliver results.

The State Government will soon start collecting tens of millions of dollars through a safety levy to fund the implementation of a new risk-based approach to safety regulation by the Department of Mines and Petroleum.

The department will hire an extra 37 mines inspectors this year, almost doubling the existing number.

The State Mining Engineer Simon Ridge says the new approach will require companies to comprehensively assess hazards and implement safety measures.

He says the new system will put both the regulator and the industry on the front foot.



Extra mines inspectors are being hired this year in a move to improve safety at sites (ABC Contribute: Araluen)

"We've been on, I suppose, a reactive basis because of the resources available to us.

"The changes that the government is putting in place will enable us to move on to a much more proactive footing and to address the risks and hazards and situations that are there out in the industry."

The Director of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy Nicole Roocke says with industry paying up to \$35 million a year to fund the new system, it is important the changes deliver significant safety improvements.

"The focus should not be on how much the levy is, nor on the number of inspectors, but on how can we do things differently and how can that levy be used to make sure that people who work in our industry go home safe at the end of the day."

Ms Roocke says it's also important the inspectors have the skills and experience to assess the actual effectiveness of safety measures in the industry.

"It's about the inspectors being out there on site, asking companies or requiring companies to demonstrate that the systems that they have are in place, are working and are improving safety."

7 killed in C China mine blast

Extract from Xinhua, China

ZHENGZHOU: At least seven people were killed after a gas blast ripped through a nickel mine in Henan Province Wednesday, the local authority said Thursday.

The government of Tanghe County in Nanyang City, the site of the accident, said it received a report at about 2:05 pm Wednesday, claiming that an explosion hit a ventilation shaft in a mining pit run by Shidai Mining Industry Co. Ltd.

Fourteen workers were exploring mining resources when the accident occurred. Aside from those killed, the seven others were injured including four seriously and had been hospitalized, according to the rescue headquarters.

The headquarters said an investigation into the cause of the blast was underway.

The company is engaged in exploring and mining non-ferrous metals such as nickel and copper.

Friday 23 April 2010

USA: Raleigh County Miner Killed in Accident at ICG Mine

Extract from wvntv.com, USA



State mine safety officials confirm a 28-year-old Raleigh County man died Friday morning after being pinned against a mine wall.

ECCLES -- A Glen Daniel man has been killed in a mine accident in Eccles.

This is the 30th mine death in Raleigh County this year.

Jama Jarrett with the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training says John King, 28, was pinned between the mine wall and a continuous mining machine.

The accident happened around 11:30 p.m. Thursday at ICG's Beckley Pocahontas mine.

The man died early Friday morning during surgery at a Charleston hospital.

Jarrett said King was married with children.

ICG owns several coal mines in West Virginia including the Sago mine where 12 men were killed in an underground explosion in January 2006.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

T

tunnel

A passage in a mine that is open to the air at both ends. (Often used in mining parlance to describe (inaccurately) an *adit*, which is only open at one end.)



-Ed