



Mining Accident News No.1018

15 to 24 June 2010

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Tuesday 15 June 2010

USA: Perry County Mining Accident Investigated

Extract from whiznews.com, USA

A miner was hurt in a weekend accident in a Perry County coal mine. A spokeswoman for the Mine Safety and Health Administration says it happened around 3:00 Saturday afternoon at the Buckingham number 7 coal mine.

Amy Louviere says a life threatening injury occurred to a miner after he was struck by a shuttle car. The victim, who was not identified, was taken to Genesis Good Samaritan Hospital with a broken pelvis. He is listed in stable condition.

Two Mine Safety and Health Administration investigators responded over the weekend and are investigating.

This is the second accident in six month for Buckingham Coal Company. Last December a miner was hurt in a Glouster mine accident after of chain of events resulted in a piece of machinery pinning him to a wall breaking his ribs.

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

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Wednesday 16 June 2010

USA: Miner killed when beam falls in Harlan County mine

Extract from the Lexington Herald Leader, USA

HOLMES MILL, Ky. -- A Harlan County coal miner has been killed on the job, the fourth mining-related fatality of the year in Kentucky.

Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Enforcement spokesman Dick Brown said the miner, whose name hasn't yet been released, died Wednesday afternoon when a steel beam fell on him at Lone Mountain Processing's Clover Fork Mine No. 1 at Holmes Mill.

Brown said the accident was triggered when coal dislodged from the mine wall and bumped a support holding up the beam.

State and federal investigators were on their way to the mine Wednesday evening.

Thursday 17 June 2010

Colombia: Antioquia coal mine explosion kills 3

Extract from Colombia Reports

Colombian emergency workers extracted the bodies of three miners killed in an explosion in the San Fernando coal mine in Amarga, Antioquia. Around 60 people are believed to still be trapped in the mine.

The explosion, which occurred around midnight Wednesday, was felt within a mile radius of the mine and was so strong it broke the windows of the mine's office located 150 meters above ground from the mine itself.

At the time of the explosion mines were changing shift. The mine's managers are calculating how many people remain trapped inside based on their shift login cards.

"The hope is that they are sheltering somewhere, although environmental conditions make this possibility unlikely because the rescue

workers had to come out because there was not a safe level of air" said Antioquia emergency services official Gilberto Mazo told El Tiempo.

Rescue efforts have been suspended while clean air is introduced and dangerous gases removed from the mine.

Around 600 miners work in the San Fernando mine, which saw a similar incident a year and a half ago, in which five people were trapped, one of whom died.

WA: Mineworkers intimidated, companies warned: Opposition

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The State Opposition has called for an investigation into mine safety in Western Australia.

Labor's mining spokesman Jon Ford says workers have made serious allegations against the Department of Mines and Petroleum Resource Safety Inspectorate.



The opposition claims mineworkers have been talked out of making complaints and an investigation is needed (ABC Contribute: Araluen)

He says in some cases the Inspectorate has warned mining companies of impending inspections, allowing companies to cover up shoddy operations.

Mr Ford also claims the Inspectorate has attempted to talk workers out of making complaints.

The Opposition wants a Royal Commission into mine safety in the state.

"If people are feeling intimidated by the inspectorate, what hope have they got of trying

to have their safety concerns dealt with and these are genuine concerns."

The Minister for Mines Norman Moore has rejected the criticism and backed the Inspectorate to do its job.

"Most of the allegations he's made are not correct and the mine safety division is very offended by the allegations he's making about their professionalism."

Friday 18 June 2010

16 killed in Colombia mine blast

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

A blast at a coal mine in Colombia has killed 16 miners and left about 70 trapped underground.

The explosion happened at the San Fernando mine in Antioquia province.

Officials say there is little likelihood of finding survivors.

The blast occurred when miners were changing shift and the exact number of people inside the mine is unknown.

It is not yet clear what caused the blast, but officials say there may have been a build up of gases.

WA: Union joins mine safety criticism

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The union representing the mining sector has described the mine safety regulator as 'dysfunctional'.

The comments from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy union come after the Opposition's Mining Spokesman Jon Ford called for an investigation into mine safety in WA.

Mr Ford says serious allegations have been made against the Department of Mines and Petroleum Resources' Safety Inspectorate.

The CFMEU's Gary Wood says there needs to be better regulation of health and safety and proper auditing.

"Despite numerous inquiries over recent years the regulator continues, in our view, to be dysfunctional, and doesn't have the appropriate resources to effectively regulate the mining industry and that's continuing to (cause) fatalities and cause serious harm to workers."

Mr Wood says significant reform is needed to improve safety.

"Where we need to go is putting in place processes where the establishment of health and safety in the industry is well-regulated and the development of safety procedures on mine sites is done in consultation with the workforce and representatives and it needs to have a proper auditing process introduced."

The Mines Minister Norman Moore has rejected the criticism and says most of the allegations are incorrect.

USA: Deadly Mine Accident in Wallace Idaho

Extract from KHQ Right Now

WALLACE, Idaho - Authorities say a miner has died from injuries suffered during an accident at the Galena Mine in northern Idaho's Silver Valley.

The Shoshone County Sheriff Department identified the victim as 29-year-old Timothy Allen Bush, of Pinehurst.

Federal investigators and officials with U.S. Silver Corp. have not yet determined a cause of Friday morning's accident, which occurred underground.

No other injuries were reported.

The mine is one of only two operating silver mines in the Silver Valley and was sold by Coeur d'Alene Mines Corp. in 2006 to Silver Corp. Galena is one of the deepest mines in North America, with workers descending about a mile underground to extract silver and copper ore.

USA: Teams at UBB Finished for the Week

Extract from West Virginia MetroNews

The state Mine Safety Office says it hopes full investigative teams can enter the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County by the middle of next week.

Those investigators, including state, federal and independent teams, will be trying to find out what caused the April 5 explosion that killed 29 miners.

Exploratory teams exited the mine early Friday afternoon after meeting their goals for the day. The teams are charged with reviewing the conditions of the mine to make sure it's safe for investigators.

The teams hit higher methane readings and waste-high water near longwall section 22 Thursday, but that's not expected to hinder the investigation. The water will be pumped out and the area will be ventilated.

Quote of the week



"You can't win unless you learn how to lose."

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
(American NBA Allstar, 1974-)

TAS: Close call as mine wall collapses

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Miners working at Savage River in Tasmania's north-west have had a close call after a massive rock slide.

An estimated 140,000 cubic metres of rock collapsed into a mine pit yesterday shutting down some operations.

Nobody was hurt but some mining equipment was damaged.

Roy Ormerod from Tasmania's Workplace Standards has praised workers for spotting the danger before it was too late.

"They were in the mine, the open area, and a few rocks dislodged from the top of the face and they looked up and realised there was an impending problem," he said.

"Everyone was able to be quickly removed from site before the main rockfall occurred."

The company says heavy rain over the past few days may have been a factor.



The size of the machinery at the bottom of the pit shows the scale of the landslide. (Grange Resources)

Grange's Wayne Bould says the northern pit wall that fell was due to be mined over the next 12 months so the company has been forced to change its production schedule.

"We have other areas available to work from on the short term and we've redirected our production efforts to there at the moment, but I'm not too sure on how we'll recut the plan over the next year," he said.

"We'll be working on that in the next week or so."

Saturday 19 June 2010

USA: Ky. miner latest dead in dangerous retreat mining

FRANKFORT, Ky. — A coal miner killed in Kentucky this week was engaged in the dangerous practice of retreat mining, which

involves deliberately cutting away pillars of coal intended to support overhead rock layers.

Statistics compiled by the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health show more than 50 miners have been killed in retreat mining operations over the past 25 years. Of those, 20 have died since 2000, including Jimmy Carmack, a miner from Barbourville who was killed Wednesday.

Amy Louviere, a spokeswoman for the federal mine safety agency, said Friday that Carmack, a section foreman with 17 years of experience, died in a retreat mining accident at Lone Mountain Processing's Clover Fork No. 1 mine at Holmes Mill in Harlan County.

In a preliminary report, federal inspectors said a section of coal 15 feet high and 12 feet wide toppled into a 100-ton jack used for roof support. The jack struck Carmack in the head.

Thurman Holcomb, general manager of Arch Coal Inc. subsidiary Lone Mountain Processing, said in a statement that the company is saddened by Carmack's death.

"We are committed to working with the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the commonwealth of Kentucky in investigating this incident, and to taking every step possible to ensure that an incident of this kind never happens again," Holcomb said.

Mine safety advocate Tony Opegard said Kentucky mine regulators recognize how deadly retreat mining can be, and that, as a result, they require miners to be properly trained on action plans.

"It is the most dangerous type of mining that there is because you're intentionally inducing the roof to fall," Opegard said. "A mining crew has to comply religiously with the plan. The smallest deviation can cause a fatality."

Louviere said investigators still were looking into the Lone Mountain fatality on Friday and that it would "take a while" to finish the probe.

"Citations may be issued during the course of the investigation," she said.

Retreat mining has been going on for generations. It is legal and considered standard procedure in mines where coal reserves have nearly played out.

In conventional mining, miners dig a maze of 20-foot-wide tunnels, leaving coal pillars in between to hold up overhead rock layers. When they have advanced as far as possible, they begin retreat mining, so named because the miners are working toward the outside, removing pillars and allowing the roof to fall in planned collapses.

"It's tremendously dangerous," said Tim Miller, an international representative for the United Mine Workers of America. "You need a lot of rabbit blood, because you have to be able to run really fast."

The Mine Safety and Health Administration reported Friday that 20 fatalities since 2000 were associated with retreat mining. The toll includes six miners entombed in Utah's Crandall Canyon Mine after a massive roof fall in 2007 and three rescue workers who were killed searching for them.

A study by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health found that 23 miners were killed in roof falls during retreat mining between 1995 and 2007. A previous NIOSH report identified 33 miners killed while doing retreat mining between 1989 and 1996.

NIOSH reported last year that retreat mining historically accounts for only 10 percent of U.S. coal production and 25 percent of roof fall fatalities.

Colombia: Uribe visits mining area where 19 people died, 53 remain trapped

Extract from tmcnet.com

Bogota, -- Colombian President Alvaro Uribe visited Saturday the coal mining area in the northwestern part of the country where 19

people died and another 53 remain trapped with little chance of being rescued alive.

The president met with families of the victims and promised them he would make every effort so they don't "feel unprotected" and are paid all the accident insurance for the miners who died.

"I want to bring you greetings full of affection, of sorrow, dear families. It hurts us a lot, I must confess that one feels powerless and there is a kind of cowardice in this sorrow," he said.

Uribe asked authorities of the northwestern province of Antioquia for a detailed report on the safety status of the coal mine that exploded Wednesday near the town of Amaga and on how the work to rescue the 53 miners trapped in a mineshaft is progressing.

Because the high concentration of gases has kept rescue work from going more quickly, emergency teams are constantly injecting air underground to lower the methane-gas level and so prevent another explosion.

The director of the Antioquia emergency services department, Jhon Fredy Rendon, said that up to now 19 bodies have been recovered and 53 miners remain trapped.

Some local media reported that emergency workers found Saturday the bodies of another four workers.

The official made it clear, however, that all the bodies recovered up to now are of miners who died in the explosion apparently caused by a concentration of methane gas.

He also said that, more than 60 hours after the explosion, the trapped miners are unlikely to be found alive, and the "only real chance is that one or several miners were enclosed by the tunnel walls that collapsed in the explosion, and that some oxygen is entering there." Antioquia Gov. Luis Alfredo Ramos said, for his part, that a commission has been organized to investigate the accident.

"This commission has to deliver, in no more than than 15 days, a report on what happened here,

that will be shared with all the victims' families and the Amaga community," he said.

In the main square of Amaga, a small town in Antioquia, a collective funeral was held Friday for several of the victims, and since Friday night there have been vigils in a number of homes.

At the time of the accident, which occurred when the workers were changing shifts, there were some 160 people in a mineshaft, of whom 90 managed to escape and 71 were trapped inside.

In November 2008, a tunnel in this mine was flooded and five workers drowned, while in 1977 another 86 lost their lives because of an explosion in another coal mine in Amaga.

This week in mining accident history

19 June 1914

Hillcrest Mine

Hillcrest, Alberta, Canada,

Underground coal mine

Methane explosion

189 dead

Source:

coalminersmemorial.tripod.com/hillcrestminedisaster.html

The worst coal mining disaster in Canada occurred in Hillcrest, Alberta, on Friday June 19, 1914. A total of 189 men died. 130 women were widowed and 400 children left fatherless. The workers were members of the United Mine Workers of America and among the other mining communities in the Crowsnest Pass -- Burmis, Leitch Collieries, Maple Leaf and Bellevue -- Hillcrest was considered to be the safest, best run operation of them all. There were 377 men on the Hillcrest Mine payroll and the average wage was a respectable \$125.00 a month. The Hillcrest catastrophe occurred just before the maelstrom of World War I, and perhaps as a consequence, was forgotten by the Canadian public.

On that Friday morning in June, the mine had been idle the previous two days due to overproduction of coal. Before 7:00 AM, the

fireboss, William Adkin, had completed his mine inspection and posted a notice in the lamphouse warning of some low levels of methane gas along with some cave-ins in various parts of the mine. Methane gas was always present in the mine, but for it to explode it had to be above 5% and less than 14%. Coal dust itself was highly explosive, but it could be kept in check if there was enough moisture to dampen it. Moisture levels that day were considered adequate. The lamphouse was where the men would pick up their miner's lamp and deposit or pick up their "checks" -- the small brass numbered tags which the timekeeper used to keep track of time worked. There were two checks in the lamp house used to identify a miner. When the miner went in the mine, he picked up both and handed one to the timekeeper who placed it on a board. That told the timekeeper that the miner was in the mine. When the miner left the mine after his shift, he deposited his second check on the board in the lamphouse next to the other one. This system showed that the man who had entered the mine, had come out safely.

The sun was starting to rise that June morning as 228 men made their way to the mine to begin their underground shifts. At that time sixty-three year old William Dodd made one of the most fortuitous decisions of his life.



Group of miners going on shift

He decided that since the mine had been idle the previous two days, there was no way that he was going to go back to work on a Friday. Dan Cullingham was scheduled for that day's afternoon shift, but, instead filled in for his friend, J.D. "Knicky Knack" Redmonson, who was sick. Tom Corkill, who had recently bought a

homestead near Lethbridge, entered the mine expecting that shift to be his last shift as a miner. It proved to be tragically true. Steve Belopotosky had switched his morning shift with a friend who wanted to be off in time to meet his wife arriving on the afternoon train. The friend never did meet his wife. There were 5 Dugdale brothers working at the mine, 3 of whom -- John, Robert and Andrew -- were going on shift that morning. As Rod Wallis and William Neath arrived for their shifts, they were looking forward to heading back to Nova Scotia on the coming Monday to start farming once again. Charles Elick, 49, was a survivor of another Crowsnest Pass Disaster -- the Frank Slide of April 29, 1903. On that day he had been working underground in the Frank Mine when the slide struck, burying the mine entrance. Charles Elick spent thirteen arduous hours before he and seventeen others dug their way to safety. On this day, Charles Elick's luck ran out. In all, the men entering the Hillcrest Mine on June 19th, 1914 ranged in age from 17 to 54 with the majority in their late 20's to early 30's.

In the mine itself there were a variety of jobs to be done. One was to load and fire the charges which loosened the coal, and this dangerous, skilled work, was carried out by the fireboss. The coal was then shovelled, moved to chutes and loaded into mine cars which were pulled along rails by horses. A continuous cable system operated by hoists located above the ground, brought the coal the rest of the way to the surface. There the coal cars were unhooked and moved by donkey engines to the tippie where the coal was sized and its ash content reduced. The mining community was a well coordinated group, all of whom relied upon the other for survival. The group included bratticemen, who kept the air from two huge electric fans flowing in and out of the mine by a system of screens or brattices; carpenters and timbermen, who made sure that the roof would not collapse; rope-riders and hoistmen, who brought the coal out or ferried the miners in and

out of the mine; the labourers, who did various odd jobs; and lastly, the miners themselves.

Work had started as normal that morning. At 9:00 a.m., eight more miners passed through the lamphouse to enter the mine. The timekeeper, Robert Hood, detected the smell of liquor on the breath of two of them and turned them away but, by mistake he put their checks on the board. This action later led to confusion as to how many miners were in the mine. Meanwhile, fireboss Sam Charleton had laid charges near Old Level One (Hillcrest Mine actually consisted of two mines -- Mine Number One and Mine Number Two each with their separate entrances and linked together by tunnels -- see map below).

MAP OF THE MINE



At 9:30 a.m., it was later determined, Sam Charleton had been just about to fire the charges when there was a huge gas explosion very close to him. This initial explosion stirred up coal dust which then spontaneously triggered a second and maybe a third blast. The force of the multiple explosions travelling along the labyrinth of tunnels was horrific -- with anyone near the source, like Sam Charleton, being killed outright. Even men working on the surface were not spared: the young rope-riders -- Charles Ironmonger (the son of Charles Eli Ironmonger), who worked at Mine Number One and Fred Kurigatz, who worked at Mine Number Two, were both killed. The entrance to Mine Number One, which was closer to the source of the explosion than Mine Number Two's entrance,

was jammed up so much debris that it was impassable. Three men -- George Wild, Antonio Stella and Arthur Crowther -- who had been working near the less-damaged entrance of Mine Number Two managed to escape from the mine within the first few minutes. A trickle of survivors followed them, but by time fifteen crucial minutes had passed, the total count of survivors was only 19 -- all the others were trapped down below.

For anyone who survived the initial explosions, the greatest danger then became the poisonous carbon dioxide gas which the miners called "black-damp" or "afterdamp". At a concentration of 13% it would cause unconsciousness, and after the explosions, the level was estimated to be at a deadly 50%. Realizing this, the first thought of the men on the surface was to suck out the deadly afterdamp with the exhaust fan located at the entrance of Mine Number One. Miraculously, the men found that the intake fan at the entrance of Mine Number Two had kept on working. At the same time, they realized that it was imperative that they get a hoist working to help with the rescue work. The hoist engine at Mine Number One was still operable, but the men had to use their bare hands to pry away the huge chunks of broken concrete which surrounded it. Somehow, they managed to quickly access the hoist engine, clear the track into the mine, and find a still serviceable mine cart to be used by a rescue team -- all accomplished within the first fifteen minutes.

Without delay, and at great risk to themselves from afterdamp, the first rescue crew entered the mine *without any breathing apparatus*. One of them was Engineer Hutchinson, who had just barely managed, minutes before, to stumble out of the mine, alive. The group got as far as the junction of Level One North and Level One South where they found three men miraculously alive. They whisked them to the surface. Meanwhile, David Murray Sr., who had escaped the explosions, had overpowered Constable William Hancock and run back into the mine to look for his sons, Robert, William and David, Jr.

Tragically, David Murray Sr.'s search proved not only futile, as his sons were dead, but fatal to himself, too. His body was later found some distance back in the mine.

At 10:00 a.m., more help and vital oxygen masks arrived from the nearby towns of Blairmore, Coleman and Frank, Alberta. Under the direction of Dr. William Dodd, an emergency hospital tent with oxygen and resuscitation equipment was set up outside the mine entrance. The oxygen masks allowed the heroic rescue crews, their numbers now bolstered by the new arrivals, to push deeper into the mine.

By now, workers had managed to clear a small hole in the totally blocked entrance of Mine Number One, and former fireboss Harry White, equipped with oxygen, squeezed through it and dropped into Slant Number One, the part of the mine where the explosion and destruction had been the worst. Harry Whiten had the grisly job of exploring and examining the devastated area. Initially, it was commonly assumed that fireboss Sam Charleton might have set off the explosions, but Harry White's detailed observations put an end to that speculation -- Sam Charleton's body was found with the firing cable still wrapped around his waist. Harry White concluded that the initial explosion was due to methane gas ignited from a spark which could have been set off by a lamp flare, electric cable short, or even a rock fall.

Level One North had escaped most of the destruction and the fans were able to clear the smoke and gas from there first. Consequently, the rescue work progressed quickly in this area and within an hour the last of the miners in this section had been brought to the surface. The rescue crews then clawed their way past broken timbers and twisted metal into Level One South where they came upon the horrific scene of thirty dead miners lying face down in a pool of water, victims of afterdamp. Further on in Slant Two, rescuers found more survivors who had tried to get out, only to be driven back by the smoke and carbon dioxide. They had managed to soak

their shirts in water and breath through them to filter out the afterdamp. By time rescuers found them, one man had drowned in a pool of water and the others were all unconscious. One of them, Joe Atkinson, whom it took three hours to revive, returned to the mine the next day as one of the rescue team.

By 11:30 a.m., there were forty men who had gotten out of the mine alive -- many of them revived by immediate treatment of oxygen and pulmotors (an early type of resuscitator) in the hospital tent. At this time, the timekeeper's error concerning the two miners sent home for drinking, was discovered, reducing the casualty list to a possible 196. Time after time, the rescuers came across the bodies of miners who had survived the initial explosions only to succumb to afterdamp -- any hope of finding more survivors was rapidly dimming. Then, shortly after 11:30 a.m. the gallant rescuers forced their way into a blocked part of Level One South and found a group of men, seven of whom were still breathing. All seven were brought to the surface and revived. They were the last survivors. Forty-six of those rescued remained alive, some of them in very poor condition. There were still very many unaccounted for with only twenty-six of the 189 bodies brought to the surface.



[Crowd gathering](#)

Meanwhile, the scene outside the mine was one of absolute shock. There were women and children wandering about aimlessly, unable to believe the total destruction of the mine and its buildings. Smoke from the explosions continued to issue forth from the mine for hours. Although the danger from further explosions was high, the

rescue teams continued to go into the mine to bring up the bodies, some of them mangled and unidentifiable except by their checks. RCMP officers Corporal Rant, Corporal Mead, and Constable William Hancock were given the grim job of identifying and washing the bodies before they were laid out for the families. As the hours passed, and the rescuers pushed deeper into the area of the mine where the devastation was the greatest, the work became slower and the number of bodies fewer. As well, work was slowed by fires which occasionally erupted and had to be brought under control by the exhausted rescuers. Yet, by Saturday afternoon 162 bodies had been viewed by the coroner and passed for burial and within a week of the explosion, only two bodies had not yet been found. One other was found in July, and the last body was never found.

Sunday 20 June 2010

Canada: Man dies in Baker County mine cave-in

Extract from OregonLive.com

A 42-year old Ontario-area man died this morning when the walls of a mining cave in Baker County collapsed on him as he was digging inside, according to the Oregon State Police.

According to OSP Senior Trooper Tracy Howard, Jose Aguiar, Jr. was digging inside a small mining cave with three other people near an old lime plant along Burnt River. This area is about 300 yards north of Interstate 84 in the vicinity of Milepost 344. As Aguiar was digging about 20 feet inside from the entrance, the rock and dirt wall caved in on top of him.

No one else was injured.

Two men, whose names were not available, spent five minutes digging him out before they could remove him from inside the cave. They were not able to immediately call 9-1-1 from the site so they placed him in their van and drove west toward Ontario, about 30 miles away.

Once they were able to call, they contacted 9-1-1 about the accident and continued to Holy Rosary Hospital in Ontario. When they arrived, emergency room personnel confirmed Aguiar was dead.

OSP is investigating.

Kazakh copper mine explosion kills three

Extract from Reuters

ALMATY - An explosion killed three copper miners in central Kazakhstan on Sunday, mine owner Kazakhmys said.

Kazakhmys is the world's eighth-largest copper miner and its shares trade on the London Stock Exchange.

A company spokeswoman, reading from a news statement, said a fourth miner had also been injured in the explosion, which occurred at about 1000 local time (0400 GMT) at the Stepnoi underground mine in the town of Satpayev, Karagandy region.

Kazakhmys said it had set up a special commission to investigate the cause of the explosion.

Kazakhmys expects to produce about 300,000 tonnes of copper cathode this year. It recently concluded all sales contracts for 2010, signaling strong demand for copper worldwide, including in China, the world's largest consumer.

USA: Miner cites tampering with sensors

Extract from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A former employee at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch coal mine has told federal investigators that miners there short-circuited detectors intended to shut off electrical equipment when levels of explosive methane rose inside the mine.

The statement was given to investigators in the wake of a massive explosion April 5 that ripped through the mine in Montcoal, W.Va., killing 29 men in the nation's worst underground coal

disaster in 40 years. Preliminary findings suggest the blast began as an explosion of methane, possibly triggering secondary explosions of coal dust.

Information about the statement was provided by three sources working with the probe who would not speak for attribution because of an ongoing criminal investigation into the Upper Big Branch disaster.

According to the sources, the miner -- who worked at Upper Big Branch until the day of the disaster -- told FBI agents and other federal investigators that he had seen wire "bridges" used to bypass alarms. Underground mine equipment, such as conveyor belts to carry mined coal and continuous mining machines used to dig it, are outfitted with sensors designed to automatically shut off current to the machines when methane or carbon monoxide levels rise.

According to people who are familiar with the witness' statement, on one or more occasions someone hooked a length of wire between the terminals, bypassing those detectors.

"It's a common practice," said Minness Justice, a former inspector for the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration who said the monitors are "very sensitive instruments, and they'll gas off really quick for very small amounts of methane" and shut down the production line. He said many mine workers will opt for handheld devices to measure methane levels at the work area.

Mr. Justice left the agency amid a controversy in the wake of a fatal mine fire four years ago at another Massey facility, the Aracoma Coal Company Alma No. 1 mine in Logan, W.Va. He said bridging monitors is not uncommon, though a clear violation of safety standards.

"I have heard the same thing," said Ron Wooten, director of the state's Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training. "We will get to the bottom of it though."

A search of citations indicates that on at least two occasions Upper Big Branch was cited for

failing to calibrate coal-dust detectors on its equipment, meaning that they might not accurately read levels of coal dust, a possible cause of the explosion.

Shortly after the blast at Upper Big Branch, the U. S. attorney's office in Charleston opened a criminal investigation. The office already had another criminal probe ongoing into the two deaths at Aracoma in 2006.

That investigation resulted in a criminal indictment of the company and charges against a supervisor, David R. Runyon, who was accused of three felony counts of falsifying a mine record. In an agreement with federal prosecutors, he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of knowingly violating a federal mine regulation by not conducting mandatory evacuation drills three months before the fatal fire.

Mr. Runyon was fined \$1,000, given a year's probation and forfeited his state certification to be a mine foreman. Prosecutors said he agreed to cooperate with the ongoing Aracoma probe.

Investigators say the case underscored a problem in pursuing criminal charges: The only criminal statute in the federal Mining Act is for falsifying a document. "The people signing documents are almost always foremen," said one investigator. "It makes it hard to move up the chain."

At Aracoma, investigators found two instances in which ground monitors on a conveyor belt had either been bypassed using a wire or appeared to have been bypassed. Those monitors would trip off power in the event of a stray electrical current.

A joint state-federal disaster inquiry produced a witness, Carl R. White, who said he saw a foreman work inside the control box of a belt that kept shutting down due to a monitor that automatically tripped off the motor. Mr. White said he did not clearly see what the foreman did, but that belt later caught fire due to a misaligned roller.

At Upper Big Branch, questions have arisen about whether methane and dust monitors were properly calibrated. On Sept. 23, 2008, a federal mine inspector, using unusually harsh language, cited the mine for two identical violations -- failure to properly calibrate monitors on a pair of machines. The inspector issued a so-called "D" order, essentially shutting down two continuous mining sites in the mine.

"The operator failed to conduct a complete examination to assure compliance with the respirable dust control parameters specified in the methane dust control plan," he wrote. "Management engaged in aggravated conduct constituting more than ordinary negligence in that production was deemed more important than conducting parameter checks on the continuous mining machine."

Two Killed in another Colombian Coal Mine Accident

Extract from Latin American Herald Tribune

BOGOTA – Two people died of suffocation from an accumulation of gases in the tunnel of a coal mine in the central Colombian province of Boyaca, authorities said.

The victims, from 39 to 42 years of age, died inside the El Totumo mine, in a rural area of the municipality of Corrales, Mauricio Flechas, coordinator of the state-run Geology and Mines Institute, or Ingeominas, told Caracol Radio.

The bodies of the two victims were recovered at some 120 meters (393 feet) below the surface in one of the mine's tunnels.

The ombudsman in Corrales, Miguel Moreno, said that according to the owners of the mine, "everything is in order as requested by the authorities of the sector."

The death of the two miners occurred just after the country was hit by similar tragedy – another 18 people dead and emergency services attempting, with little hope, to rescue an additional 53 who are still trapped in the San

Fernando mine in Amaga, a town in the northwestern province of Antioquia.

The explosion from an accumulation of gases occurred Wednesday, and this Saturday Colombian President Alvaro Uribe traveled to the disaster area to meet with families of the victims.

Illegal Mining Kills Two in North China

Extract from Xinhua, China

Two miners were killed and two others were reported missing following an accident while the group was illegally mining in an iron mine in north China's Hebei Province Saturday, local authorities said Sunday.

The accident was reportedly caused by a landslide triggered by rains on Saturday afternoon at the Xunxing Iron Mine in Wushijiazui Town in Pingquan County in Chengde City of Hebei, according to a county official.

Rescue work and an investigation into the cause of the accident have been launched, the official said.

The person in charge of the mine has been detained. The mine was prohibited from production since June 2008 and water and electricity supplies had been cut off since then, the official said.

USA: Despite suspensions, 6 still at Massey jobs

Extract from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

LOGAN, W.Va. -- Almost four years after authorities moved to lift the mining licenses of seven Massey Energy employees for safety violations after a mine fire in which two men died, six of them remain on the job, one as a mine rescue team member.

Michael A. Plumley serves on a Massey rescue team that was dispatched to the scene of the April 5 explosion at the Massey-run Upper Big Branch mine, where 29 men died. At the same time, he faces suspension of his license to mine,

accused of safety violations at Massey's Aracoma Coal Co. Alma No. 1 mine on Jan. 19, 2006.

He is accused of overlooking numerous safety problems at that mine, but his suspension is in limbo along with others because his lawyer says he is the subject of a federal criminal investigation into the operations and deaths at Aracoma.

The Board of Appeals, the state body that reviews West Virginia's Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training motions to decertify coal miners, has repeatedly agreed to requests by the men to suspend the hearings until a federal grand jury probe is complete. Lawyers for the six men have said their clients are potential targets of prosecution or witnesses in connection with their roles at Aracoma, and that to attempt to defend themselves before the board could compromise their rights in the event of federal charges.

"It's terribly, terribly frustrating," said Ron Wooten, director of OMHST. "I wish we could do something about it. Those stays continue to come up for review and then another stay is granted, and so it's the same old, same old."

Both Mr. Wooten and Mr. Plumley's attorney, Michael Fisher, believe the federal investigation could wrap up by summer's end when a five-year statute of limitations approaches. Only then could the state begin the series of hearings necessary to remove or suspend the certification of the miners.

"They requested that stay based on the fact that their clients would likely have to comment or make statements that may be contrary to their best interests or self-incrimination," Mr. Wooten said.

Massey officials did not respond to requests for comment about the situation. Mr. Wooten said Massey could, of its own accord, dismiss the men for violating basic safety rules.

"If the coal company feels that these individuals have done something contrary to the coal

company's interest, contrary to their training, contrary to the law, they can get rid of them, absolutely," he said.

West Virginia requires a state certification to work underground, although the state gives varying degrees of certification and sometimes lifts a miner's right to work as a supervisor but allows the miner to remain underground as a worker. One of the Aracoma miners cited by the state four years ago, Carl R. White, voluntarily surrendered his license.

The only other one of the miners not currently working at Aracoma is Mr. Plumley, a section foreman who led his crew out of the mine when a fire erupted. Called before the panel investigating the cause of the fire, he repeatedly invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to provide answers to every question, including his home address and the name of the company-provided lawyer seated beside him.

Testimony by other witnesses at the 2006 inquiry, as well as questions by members of the investigating team, suggested that Mr. Plumley might have been aware that a set of air-control walls, called "stoppings," had been removed.

It was the removal of those stoppings by a crew in October 2005 that changed the flow of air inside the mine and allowed thick, black smoke from the fire to wash over the fleeing crew, leading to the deaths of miners Ellery Hatfield and Donald I. Bragg. The removal of those stoppings was among the issues that led to massive fines and citations against Massey.

State mine safety officials said that Mr. Plumley has since transferred to Massey's East Kentucky rescue team. That team was among crews sent to Upper Big Branch after the huge underground explosion in April killed 29 men. Details of his role in rescue efforts there could not be determined.

Mr. Fisher emphasized Mr. Plumley's efforts to lead his team to safety during the Aracoma fire and his aborted attempt to go back in to look for

Mr. Hatfield and Mr. Bragg. "He's a very brave man," Mr. Fisher said.

To others, Mr. Plumley's actions amid the flames could not outweigh the safety problems on his section. "He knew that escapeway was compromised, and he did nothing about it," said Bruce E. Stanley, attorney for the Bragg and Hatfield families who sued the company.

The state's complaint against Mr. Plumley contends that testimony by other witnesses shows that he "failed to keep careful watch over production activities" in the section he supervised. The complaint cited hazards that included accusations that he failed to keep records of the section's roof plan, allowed excessive accumulations of flammable coal dust and failed to make certain proper ventilation fixtures were in place.

The state sought to suspend any of Mr. Plumley's mining certifications.

Another of the miners claiming to be under federal investigation yet still employed is Dustin Dotson, who was the mine foreman at Aracoma. West Virginia officials tried to revoke his certification and want him permanently barred from holding any future certifications.

The state mine safety office accused Mr. Dotson of failing to keep a careful watch over the ventilating system and cited the missing stoppings in its filing.

After the Board of Appeals granted its initial stay, Mr. Wooten's office invoked its authority to issue a temporary suspension against the men, including Mr. Dotson. The board, responding to appeals that included a pleading by Mr. Dotson's lawyer that his client "will suffer immediate irreparable economic harm," overruled Mr. Wooten.

Both a final report by the state and testimony during the Aracoma probe by Mr. White -- the only one of the seven to surrender his certification voluntarily -- suggested that Mr. Dotson is under scrutiny for bypassing a carbon

monoxide detector on the belt line that later caught fire.

A final report by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration found two locations in which the monitors that shut down the belt after detecting potential danger might have been bypassed.

One found a monitor on the belt drive's motor, "was observed with a short length of wire attached to the No. 4 terminal. This wire was in close proximity to the No. 3 terminal, but was not connected to it. Although it appeared the wire may have been used previously to defeat the ground monitor, it was not connected to both terminals at the time of the inspection."

Another safety monitor on a cooling fan for another motor on the drive "was intentionally disabled" with a short length of wire that was used to jump between two terminals.

The U.S. Attorney's office for the Southern District of West Virginia confirmed after the Aracoma incident that it had opened a criminal case. The company paid record fines after one grand jury indictment, but sources indicated the grand jury did not end its inquiry there. Should a presentment arrive by summer's end, the state would then be free to pursue the licenses of any of the six men not charged.

Mr. Wooten said that, to date, he is not certain all six of the men could have been considered "targets" of the grand jury and was unclear whether they had received so-called "target letters" routinely sent by federal prosecutors to potential defendants.

Monday 21 June 2010

Colombia mine blast toll rises to 70

Extract from Sydney Morning Herald, Aus

Rescuers have pulled four more bodies from a coal mine in northwestern Colombia where an explosion killed more than 70 people, officials said.

The blast on Wednesday near Medellin charred many workers inside. So far, 23 bodies have been recovered, including four on Sunday, Amaga town Mayor Auxilio del Socorro Zapata said.

Searchers were struggling to locate more bodies as they faced heavy gas concentrations in some areas and damaged track inside the mine.

Sixty percent of Amaga's 27,000 inhabitants directly or indirectly make a living from the area's coal mines, according to the mayor.

President Alvaro Uribe expressed his condolences over the disaster, saying he was "very sad... for the people trapped there. It's a very difficult fate".

Colombia's Minister of Mines Hernan Martinez said there appeared to have been no gas detectors in the mine.

Zambia Mine accident leaves 22 miners seriously injured

Extract from the Lusaka Times

22 miners were seriously injured in an underground mine accident at the Chinese Coal Mine (CCM) in Sinazongwe in Southern Province on Sunday.

And an unsuspecting Chinese Officer escaped lynching by an angry mob as he was assisting the injured miners access medical attention at Maamba Hospital.

Quick action from Maamba Hospital staff saved the mob from further lynching the Chinese national. The Hospital staff had a difficult task to contain the mob which earlier accused the mining company of failing to follow safety measures which has continued to cause accidents at the mine.

Both CCM spokesperson and Sinazongwe District Commissioner Oliver Pelete confirmed the development to ZANIS and said they would give a full detailed account of the incident that occurred yesterday in the afternoon.

A check by ZANIS at Maamba Hospital found that all the 22 injured miners were admitted except one Chinese national who sustained a broken nose and was rushed to Lusaka by management.

One of the injured miners Musho Simala, 26, disclosed from his hospital bed to ZANIS that the air bag that supplies Oxygen underground burst up causing the air pressure in the tunnel where the unsuspecting miners were.

He said air pressure resulted in the miners collapsing and hitting themselves against the rocks and pillars underground. The CCM has been having several accidents resulting from poor safety measures; in 2009 the mine was closed after recording several deaths that included a Chinese national and for failing to follow safety measures.

Tuesday 22 June 2010

China coal mine explosion kills 47

BEIJING — An explosion at a central Chinese colliery on Monday killed 47 coal miners, state media reported, the latest deadly accident to strike the country's notoriously dangerous mining sector.

The blast happened near Pingdingshan city in the central province of Henan when a store of gunpowder kept underground detonated, according to reports citing the State Administration of Work Safety.

The accident in the Xingdong No 2 Mine occurred at about 1:40 am (1740 GMT) as 75 miners were at work, 28 of whom were brought to safety, China Central Television said.

The remaining 47 have been confirmed dead, it said.

An initial police investigation found that the privately owned mine was operating illegally as its mining license had expired on June 6, Xinhua news agency said.

Police have detained mine owner Liu Jianguo, it added.

Of the 28 rescued, six were hurt seriously including one miner who suffered burns to 78 percent of his body, the official China News Service said, adding that all the casualties were in stable condition.

The issue of mining safety is sensitive in China, as the workers that toil in mines are largely poor migrants. The ruling Communist Party has vowed to protect their interests.

Following Monday's accident, Zhao and Luo Lin, the head of the state work safety bureau, travelled to Henan to oversee rescue efforts personally, state media reports said.

1 person killed, 1 is injured at the Asarco Ray Mine

Extract from the Arizona Republic

A 53-year-old miner was killed and another seriously injured Sunday when a 240-ton hauling truck ran over their pickup at the Asarco LLC Ray mine east of Florence, according to preliminary accident reports.

Thomas E. Benavidez, a diesel mechanic at the open-pit mine, was killed instantly in the 10 a.m. accident, while another worker was taken to a hospital with severe injuries, said Tim Evans, assistant mine inspector for the state.

Two inspectors from the Arizona Mine Inspector's office are looking into the accident, he said, and the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration also is investigating.

It appears that Benavidez and another mechanic, William Hyde, pulled in front of the large hauling truck, and the driver of the hauling truck could not see their pickup, Evans said.

The early reports do not indicate whether Benavidez or Hyde was driving.

"These haul trucks are literally two to three stories tall," Evans said. "They have blind spots. The pickup was broadsided and the haul truck

rolled over the pickup with the two employees inside."

Miners were able to extricate Hyde from the wreckage. The extent of his injuries was not available, Evans said.

The federal accident report from MSHA said Benavidez had eight years of experience, three at the Ray mine.

That report listed his age as 52, although federal and state officials said their reports are preliminary and details are subject to change, especially personnel data not readily available from the remote site on the weekend.

"Our prayers and sympathy go out to family members, friends and co-workers who are affected by this loss," Asarco President and Chief Operating Officer Manuel Ramos said in a prepared statement.

The death was the second in Arizona this year and the 11th nationwide for the mining industry excluding coal mines, according to MSHA. Coal mines have lost 38 workers so far this year.

The other Arizona mining fatality this year was Jan. 9 at the Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc. Miami Mine, when an employee working for Ames Construction Inc. of Phoenix was killed, according to MSHA.

Estevan R. Benavidez, 20, was killed when a 400-foot-long section of 24-inch diameter pipe fell and struck him, according to the report.

Mining deaths fell to an all-time low in 2009. But after a large accident that killed 29 coal miners in West Virginia earlier this year, 2010 will not repeat that record.

Already, 49 miners have died in coal and other mines in the U.S. this year, according to MSHA.

In 2009, coal mines recorded 18 deaths, and other mines recorded 16, for a total of 34 (one in Arizona). That was down from 53 nationwide in 2008.

Alaska: Nevada man, 20, dies in mining accident

Extract from the Fairbanks Daily News

FAIRBANKS - A Nevada man died Monday morning following a mining accident in Livengood.

Jacob Ryan Branham, 20, of Spring Creek, Nev., was a drilling helper with AK Drilling, Inc. a Montana-based company contracted through International Tower Hill Mines to conduct exploration work at what is said to be one of the largest gold discoveries in recent years.

Branham's clothing was caught in a piece of moving equipment, believed to be a large drill, just after 5:30 a.m. He was sucked into an industrial drill and likely suffered a broken neck, Alaska State Trooper spokeswoman Megan Peters said.

An AK Drilling crew transported him from the mine toward Fairbanks for treatment and were met by the Steese Fire Department at about 7:30 a.m. on the Elliott Highway, at which time Branham was pronounced dead.

Foul play is not suspected in Branham's death, but an autopsy has been ordered by the State Medical Examiner.

A spokeswoman for AK Drilling, Inc. said that the owner of the company was on his way to Livengood but unreachable by cell phone. She did not know how long Branham had been employed with the company.

On his MySpace page, Branham said June 6 that he planned to be in Alaska until July 10.

USA: W.Va. mine operator cited in deadly accident

Extract from Bloomberg Businessweek

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Five serious violations by a coal company contributed to the death of a West Virginia miner who was crushed by a runaway locomotive, investigators said in a report issued Tuesday.

The state Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training report blamed a broken wire cable on a hoist for the death of Fayette County resident Charles Dixon, 53, at Newtown Energy's Eagle Mine on Oct. 27. When the cable snapped, the locomotive, a rail car and a hoist car weighing a combined 64,000 pounds careened 525 feet downhill and struck Dixon, the report said. Two miners riding up with the load jumped to safety on the downhill trip. They were treated for their injuries and released.

"They pushed the emergency stop," investigator Eugene White told the state Board of Coal Mine Health and Safety. "But the hoist car would not slow down or stop."

Investigators cited Newtown after finding the brakes on one side of the hoist car weren't working properly due to improper maintenance.

The brakes were overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the load, said investigator Randy Smith.

"It's designed only to stop that car. It's not designed to stop other things that are attached to the track car," Smith said. "It was just too much weight for the system."

The cable snapped due to corrosion that had cut its strength as much as 30 percent, based on tests conducted after the accident, Smith said. It had been tested about a month earlier, but its diminished strength was missed, he said.

Two other serious citations involved improper maintenance of parts of the hoist. Two others were issued because Dixon was not waiting in a designated safe area and because the two injured miners were riding up with other equipment.

The board has authority to write state mining rules. White said the agency is recommending stricter inspection requirements for hoist and elevator cables.

Newtown also was cited for four noncontributing violations, including having the wire cable tested by a contractor who wasn't certified to work in

West Virginia, White said. The contractor also was cited.

The company uses the hoist to raise and lower equipment on the steep 1,750-foot slope leading into the Eagle Mine about 27 miles outside Charleston.

USA: Fire prompts Utah coal mine to shut down

Extract from Associated Press

WELLINGTON, Utah — The Utah Office of Coal Mine Safety says an underground fire has shut down Dugout Canyon mine 18 miles northeast of Price.

Acting agency director Peter Hackford says rising carbon monoxide levels forced the mine's evacuation early Tuesday.

Dugout employs 275 workers.

Hackford says he believes the problem is a smoldering coal seam. It's the same problem that shut down Dugout mine for three weeks in May.

The federal Mine Safety and health Administration put out an automated alert on what it called a "heating event" and evacuation at Dugout.

The status of the mine wasn't clear late Tuesday. A shift supervisor at Dugout didn't return a message from The Associated Press. A spokeswoman at St. Louis-based Arch Coal Co., Dugout's owner, says it is monitoring the situation.



Dugout Canyon Mine

Wednesday 23 June 2010

USA: Mine Regulator Sued by Massey

Extract from the Wall Street Journal

Massey Energy Co. sued the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration and three of its officials Tuesday, arguing that the agency wouldn't approve ventilation practices in its mines that Massey says would have benefited the safety and health of miners.

The company, which is being investigated by the MSHA following an April explosion that killed 29 miners at its Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, W.Va., said it couldn't challenge the MSHA's ventilation-plan requirements under federal mine law. Massey said that violated its constitutional rights.

In particular, Massey said the MSHA prevented the company from using dust scrubbers in its mines that would filter out dust that is dangerous for miners to breathe. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., by six Massey subsidiaries based in West Virginia and Kentucky.

"The goal of the lawsuit is pretty simple. It's to retain some control of the ventilation plans our mines operate under," said Shane Harvey, Massey's general counsel.

Amy Louviere, an MSHA spokeswoman, said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation. The agency has said it restricted the use of scrubbers at Massey mines because the equipment wasn't cleaning the air adequately.

Massey, of Richmond, Va., has quarreled in recent months with the MSHA over ventilation issues and specifically about the use of dust scrubbers, vacuum-like pieces of equipment used to filter the air around mining equipment to reduce the amount of coal dust. Inhaling coal dust can lead to black-lung disease.

Ventilation issues are also at the heart of the civil probe the MSHA is conducting into the April 5 explosion. In that case, federal mine-safety

officials say they believe high levels of methane caused the accident, though it isn't known how the gas built up or what ignited it. Mine operators use elaborate ventilation plans to flush methane from mines and spread limestone on surfaces to suppress coal dust. Mr. Harvey said the suit was unrelated to the April accident.

The MSHA's administrator for coal-mine safety and health, Kevin Stricklin, who was named in the Massey suit as a defendant, previously said he believed Massey wanted to use scrubbers to enable it to increase its production rates, because scrubbers can allow a company to mine more coal without interruption.

Mr. Harvey denied that production issues spurred the lawsuit. "We didn't take this step lightly," he said. "Obviously we would prefer not to sue the agency that regulates us."

China: Coal mine where 47 miners killed operates illegally

Extract from Xinhua, China

PINGDINGSHAN, Henan -- A coal mine in central China's Henan Province where an underground explosion killed 47 people Monday was operating illegally, officials said Tuesday.

The operation license of Xingdong No. 2 Mine in Weidong District, Pingdingshan City, expired on June 6, and the district government cut its electricity supply on June 7, according to local officials.

But mine manager Liu Jianguo still managed to produce coal even as ten district government supervisors were stationed at the mine, said Luo Lin, head of the State Administration of Work Safety.

The shaft should have been sealed with concrete but instead it was covered with a "moveable" cement board, reporters at the scene witnessed.

"The accident shows safety regulations were not strictly observed at the grassroots level and that some regulators may be in cahoots with mine owners," said Luo.

Seventy-five miners were underground when the blast occurred. Twenty-five of the 28 rescued miners were hospitalized, one of whom has been discharged. Fifteen are in stable conditions while the nine others are in serious conditions.

Thursday 24 June 2010

Kazakhstan: Two killed in Kazakh coal mine blowout

Extract from Reuters Africa

KARAGANDY Kazakhstan, - A gas blowout killed two coal miners in a Kazakh mine owned by ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steelmaker, the local branch of the Emergencies Ministry said on Thursday.

The accident occurred at 2240 local time (1640 GMT) on Wednesday in a ventilation shaft in the Tusup Kuzembayev mine, one of several coal mines operated by ArcelorMittal around its steel plant in the central Karagandy region, the ministry said.

ArcelorMittal Temirtau, the company's unit in Kazakhstan, confirmed the accident and said that a search for two missing miners was continuing. It did not confirm any deaths.

At the time of the accident, 168 miners were underground. A third miner was injured and saved by a colleague, ArcelorMittal said in a statement, while the rest escaped unharmed.

Accident-prone mines across the former Soviet Union have been the scene of several disasters in recent years. Russia is inspecting safety at all its coal mines after blasts killed 66 miners in May at a mine owned by Rospadskaya. In Kazakhstan, an explosion at a copper mine owned by Kazakhmys killed three people at the weekend.

The Karagandy branch of the emergencies ministry said a special commission would be set up to investigate the accident after an operation to retrieve the miners' bodies was completed.

3 Miners Still Trapped after Mine Blast in C. China

Extract from Xinhua, China

Three coal miners have been rescued but three others remain trapped after a coal mine blast in Hunan Province, the local government said Thursday.

Six miners were working about 30 meters underground in Tianxin Colliery of Jiahe County, Chenzhou City when a large amount of coal and gas burst out Wednesday noon.

They were conducting a gas examination and shaft maintenance when the blast happened.

Rescuers lifted three of the six men to the ground at 9:30 p.m. Wednesday. However, the location of the other three miners remained unknown, said Yin Zhenliang, the county's publicity chief.

The rescued miners were discharged from hospital after overnight medical observation.

The mine, owned by the county's township-level government, had a license to operate.

USA: Sen. Jay Rockefeller Issues Statement Demanding Mine Safety Answers

Extract from State Journal

According to a news release from Rockefeller's office, Sen. Jay Rockefeller issued a statement Wednesday evening on Inspector General Alert.

The statement reads, "In April, I joined Representatives Miller, Rahall, and Woolsey in writing to the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General (OIG) requesting a comprehensive investigation of the Pattern of Violations (POV) process. The investigation is ongoing, but today's alert memorandum from the OIG is deeply troubling and unacceptable. It is further evidence that we must pass legislation that will improve the current system.

"I have heard from Secretary Solis and Joe Main, and they've assured me that they are working to get to the bottom of this. It is clear

MSHA has needed additional resources for some time, and I will insist on a full assessment of their resource gaps as well as an action plan for affected mines by Monday, June 28. Agency resources should not be a factor when MSHA determines whether or not to take enforcement action to protect miners from safety violations.

"We must do everything necessary to prevent future mining accidents. I will continue to hold all parties who are responsible for mine safety – including MSHA – fully accountable for their actions. Hard-working coal miners enter mines throughout West Virginia and across the country every day – we must make sure that they are working in the safest mines possible and that there are no holes in MSHA's enforcement."

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

W

water-jacket smelter

A smelter in which the furnace is a double-skinned steel vessel with water circulating between the skins to help cool the structure and prevent it melting.



Remnants of the old days: water-jacket smelter at lead and silver mine from 1885 at Captain's Flat, east of Canberra, NSW

-Ed