



Mining Accident News No.1023

7 to 19 August 2010

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Saturday 7 August 2010

Chile: 34 miners trapped after roof collapse

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Thirty-four miners are trapped inside a copper mine in northern Chile after the roof of the main access to the mine collapsed.

As the rescue effort proceeds, relatives and colleagues of the miners have maintained a vigil outside the San Esteban mine in the Atacama desert about 800 kilometres north of Santiago.

The miners were working at a depth of about 450 metres when the cave-in occurred and officials say it is likely that they have made their way to a nearby refuge.

The shelter has emergency supplies of food, water and oxygen to last for 48 hours.

More than 100 rescue workers are making slow progress removing tons of rocks that are impeding access to the mine.

It is unclear if the government or regulatory authorities will take action against the mine but the mining minister says its safety record is being investigated.

Monday 9 August 2010

QLD: Inspectors to probe alleged safety breaches at quarry

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Mines and explosive inspectors will this week visit a quarry at Kin Kin, north-west of Maroochydore on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, as part of an investigation into alleged safety breaches at the site.

They will be joined by officers from the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM), who suspended operations at the quarry last week.

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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A group of Kin Kin residents is taking legal action and want the quarry shut down permanently.

Allen Packer from the Quarry Action Working Group says the State Government investigation does not go far enough.

"The department may be able to enforce certain things under legislation," he said.

"They will, hopefully, insist upon compliance with the safety issues.

"As far as we can see, the achievements here will be very cosmetic."

Tuesday 10 August 2010

WA: Minister denies inquiry sparked by death

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The State Government has launched an independent investigation into complaints about mine safety inspectors.

The Minister for Mines Norman Moore ordered the investigation after complaints about safety problems at the Norseman Gold-owned OK mine.



Norman Moore says the death of a worker at an underground mine did not prompt the inquiry which was already underway (BHP Billiton: file photo)

A spokesman for Mr Moore says the investigation started about a month ago, three weeks before the death of a 59 year-old man last week.

Rene Orlando Ponce died when he fell down an emergency shaft.

The Australian Workers Union says inspectors from the Department of Mines ignored numerous complaints about safety at the site.

Mr Moore denies the inquiry was sparked by Mr Ponce's death.

The Minister says the inquiry is being conducted by auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"There were a particular set of allegations from a union official who has claimed to have kept records which show that inspectors haven't been doing their job properly," he said.

"I await with interest the results of the inquiry and hope they find departmental staff have been acting properly."

ABC News Online WA posted a special report on mine safety earlier this year - to view this feature, go to

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/04/22/2879673.htm>

Four Dead, 12 Injured in Mining Accident in Colombia

Extract from Latin America Herald Tribune

BOGOTA – Four people were killed and 12 others injured when a platform collapsed while repairs were being made at the El Cerrejon mine in the northeastern province of Guajira, the mining company said Thursday.

The platform collapsed on Wednesday while 16 workers tried to fix a coal silo, the El Cerrejon mining company said in a statement.

One worker was brought out of the mine alive but died while being transported to a hospital.

The other three workers died at the accident scene from the injuries they sustained, the company said.

Colombia experienced its worst mining accident in recent years in June, when an explosion at a coal mine killed 73 people.

The explosion occurred on June 16 at the San Fernando mine in the northwestern town of

Amaga, while most of the miners were working at a depth of 2,600 meters (8,524 feet).

The blast, apparently due to an accumulation of gas, occurred during a shift change.

Ninety of the 163 miners inside at the time of the accident walked out under their own power the following morning.

A November 2008 flood in a different shaft at San Fernando left five workers dead, while 86 people perished in a 1977 explosion at another coal mine in Amaga.

Chile to Overhaul Mine Supervision as Workers Remain Trapped for Fifth Day

Extract from Bloomberg.com

Chile's government plans to overhaul the supervision of mining operations in the country as more than 30 workers remained trapped in an underground mine for a fifth day, President Sebastian Pinera said.

"We are going to accelerate legislation that was under review to completely revise all regulations to ensure mining activity provides more guarantees, tranquillity and security to workers," Pinera said today from Santiago in televised remarks.

The miners were trapped Aug. 5 after an access tunnel caved in at Cia. Minera San Esteban Primera SA's San Jose copper and gold mine in northern Chile's Atacama region. Companies including BHP Billiton Ltd. have joined the rescue effort, Mining Minister Laurence Golborne said in an interview with TVN. Authorities have sought advice on the rescue from countries including Peru, Canada, the U.S. and Australia, Pinera said.

The government plans to restructure Sernageomin, the country's mining and geological service, and will seek out and sanction those responsible for the accident, Pinera said after cutting short a trip to Colombia, where he has scheduled to attend Juan Manuel Santos's swearing-in as president.

"We've been able to determine in the case of San Jose that in many mining operations the safety of our workers is not being taken into consideration as it should," Pinera said.

Opposition senators Guido Girardi and Fulvio Rossi plan to introduce legislation that would increase penalties for companies that fail to comply with safety standards, according to a statement posted today on the Senate website.

"Workers die every year in mining accidents and we've realized that a lot of times the company's negligence is the cause," Girardi said.

Rescue efforts are focused on drilling from the surface to deliver food, water and fresh air after an attempt to enter the mine's main access was abandoned because of concerns over rescuers safety, emergency agency Onemi said on its website.

Pedro Simonevic, San Esteban executive, told reporters Aug. 6 that the accident "couldn't have been foreseen" and that the company is looking into reasons for the collapse. He said a July 3 accident at the mine resulting in an injury was unrelated.

USA: Methane Prompts Massey Mine Evacuation

Extract from The Wall Street Journal

Elevated levels of methane forced federal and state mine safety officials to evacuate the Massey Energy Co. coal mine Tuesday during their investigation of the April explosion that killed 29 miners.

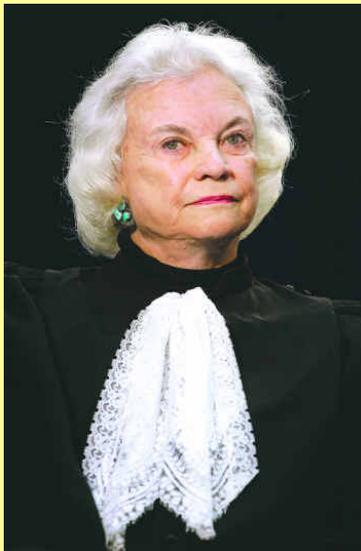
Amy Louviere, a spokeswoman for the Mine Safety and Health Administration, confirmed that methane levels of between 2% and 3% were detected from a monitoring hole connected to the surface of Massey's Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, W.Va. The methane was detected underground near the mine's longwall, a high productivity area and one of the sites where investigators believe the explosion could have started.

Federal officials have said that a buildup of methane, which is explosive between 5% and 15%, is the likely cause of the April blast. Massey has said that an inundation of methane could have come from a crack in the mine floor near the longwall, but federal and state officials have called that theory premature.

Methane is liberated naturally from coal seams and it wasn't clear what the source of the elevated gas levels were on Tuesday or why the mine's ventilation system, which has been repaired since the accident, didn't clear the gas before it began to rise.

The investigation of the April accident, the worst coal mining disaster in 40 years, has been hampered repeatedly by underground conditions. After the accident, investigators were kept out of the mine for more than two months by high levels of carbon monoxide and potentially explosive gases, including methane. Water accumulations have kept them from accessing an area near the longwall where the explosion might also have started.

Quote of the week



"Do the best you can in every task, no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time. No one learns more about a problem than the person at the bottom."

Sandra Day O'Connor
(American Jurist, first female member of
Supreme Court USA, 1930-)

Wednesday 11 August 2010

Chile: Piñera promises full investigation into accident with 33 trapped miners

Extract from MercoPress

With 33 miners remain trapped in a mine near the city of Copiapó in Chile's north the Chilean government is taking action to determine who is responsible for this tragedy and how similar events can be avoided in the future.

Top officials have been meeting over the past several days in the presidential palace La Moneda, and investigations have already started into the background, safety measures and internal documents of San Esteban Primera, the company that owns the San Jose mine.

The 33 miners have been trapped underground within the mine since last Thursday. Since, the mine has ceased all operations.



Rescue efforts so far have been unsuccessful

"Now is the time to look for those responsible, and they will not go unpunished," said President Sebastián Piñera. "While there is no guarantee of security, the mine will not reopen".

The president also announced that the National Geologic and Mining Service (Sernageomin) would be restructured, after reports surfaced of inefficient mine and safety audits.

Gabriel Meza, the local district attorney, is also taking action. He has opened an investigation into San Esteban, including the confiscation of internal documents to review records of its operations, shifts, workers and permits. Meza confirmed said the company's executives "have helped and cooperated fully. Everything was voluntary and transparent".

Meza says he plans to question all executives of Sernageomin. "Whatever negligence there is in the network will be investigated by the National District Attorney's Office," said Sabas Chahuán, national district attorney.

Deputies Giovanni Calderón and Patricio Melero also asked for an investigation into why the mine reopened in 2008 after closing in 2007. Former regional director of Sernageomin, Anton Hraste, said the mine's reopening was questionable at best.

"The head of the company was aware that this mine should not have been reopened ever," he said. "Under my direction, the mine stayed closed."

But while government officials scramble to find the responsible parties and the underlying reasons for the mine's collapse, all eyes remain on the rescue effort. On Tuesday morning outside La Moneda, citizens and government officials gathered for a morning prayer for the trapped miners.

Miguel Fortt, a mine engineer and rescue expert who has worked on similar rescue efforts, said he remained positive about the mission at hand. "With all the resources that there are, I have no doubt," that the men will be rescued successfully, he said.

He also said the time needed for drilling to give food and water to the miners would probably be shortened, although it was previously to take about six days. "With the current conditions, where Monday we were able to drill down 200 meters in 22 hours, we are reducing the period," he said. With air and water, Fortt explained, it is

possible for humans to stay alive for almost 1.5 months.

Fort said if alive, the miners could probably hear the machines working, which "could raise their spirits."

Thursday 12 August 2010

China mine fire kills 16, while gas blast kills 1

Extract from MercuryNews.com

BEIJING—A gas leak in a China coal mine killed at least one worker and trapped five more Saturday, just hours after a fire in a gold mine killed 16.

The gas leak happened Saturday morning at the mine in Shifang city in the southwestern province of Sichuan, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. The report said the leak at the mine run by Hongda Red Star Mining Co., Ltd. was the third gas leak at a China coal mine this week.

In a separate accident, a fire killed 16 at the Lingnan Gold Mine in Zhaoyuan city in the eastern province of Shandong. The fire initially trapped 50 miners, but the rest were rescued.

China Central Television footage Saturday showed one rescued miner, shirtless, covering his eyes with a towel as he and others walked out of an elevator at the mine shaft entrance.



In this photo rescuers, by China's Xinhua News Agency

An official who identified himself only by his surname Li said the fire was caused by an underground cable, and the owner of the mine

was in police custody. Xinhua said 329 people were working in the mine when the fire started.

China has the world's deadliest mining industry with more than 2,600 people killed in mine accidents last year. Those figures represent a drop from previous years as the government has moved to close down smaller, illegal mines.

This week 25 miners were killed in two separate accidents when lethal gas seeped into the mines where they were working. Nine workers were killed at a mine Monday in central Henan province, while 16 workers died Tuesday at a mine in southwestern Guizhou province.

Mining deaths jumped again in the first half of this year. Coal mine deaths through June were 1,261, up from 1,175 in the same period last year.

Earlier this month, a spokesman for the work safety administration told the China Daily newspaper the jump was caused in part by China's recovery from the economic crisis.

Last month, Premier Wen Jiabao ordered mine managers and bosses to accompany workers down into mine shafts in a bid to improve safety.

However, the approach has failed to produce any impact. More than 100 miners have died in the past month. None of those killed were mine bosses or managers—a fact noted with unusual criticism by the typically docile state media.

USA: Officials say cause of Upper Big Branch mine disaster in West Virginia still unclear

Extract from The Washington Post

Federal regulators said Wednesday that they were more than halfway through their investigations inside West Virginia's Upper Big Branch coal mine but still need to examine more of the mine's equipment and talk to executives at mine owner Massey Energy.

Two top officials at the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration said in a conference call with reporters that they had not reached any

conclusions about what caused the explosion that killed 29 miners at Upper Big Branch. The April 5 blast was the worst U.S. mining accident in 40 years.

"There has not been enough evidence and information amassed yet to make any kind of determination as to the cause of the disaster," said Joseph A. Main, who heads the agency.

But the officials disputed a theory put forward by Massey, that a huge crack in the floor of the mine may have allowed an influx of the explosive gas methane.

"Our investigators underground have not taken a picture of a 150-foot crack. What we've seen is floor-heaving," or shifts in the floor of the mine tunnel, said Kevin Stricklin, Main's subordinate. "We've not seen any massive crack that is 150" feet long.

The officials said that they had interviewed 166 people in their investigation so far -- mainly rank-and-file workers at the mine, operated by Massey subsidiary Performance Coal. They said they will begin sending subpoenas to higher-level executives for interviews in the next month.

The regulators said that they have sent specialized teams into the mine, including a "Flames and Forces" team meant to chart the path of the deadly explosion and fire. They said technicians are still testing monitors from machinery inside the mine, which were meant to detect flammable gas. Main declined to answer a question about whether any of these showed signs of tampering.

The two officials said that a pair of key areas, deep inside the mine, had not yet been studied because water had flooded the mine's chambers. Stricklin and Main said they would hold public hearings into the disaster, but declined to say when that might happen.

Main vowed to "scour the earth to determine what happened at the Upper Big Branch mine."

Friday 13 August 2010

Regulators face ax over Chilean mining disaster

Extract from UPI.com

SANTIAGO, Chile, -- Chile's regulators responsible for safe upkeep of the country's mines Friday faced the ax as the fate of 33 miners trapped deep under a collapsed shaft for nine days remained uncertain.

The disaster in northern Chile caused widespread outrage in the country as families of the men, experts and miners' representatives said the accident was avoidable.

Chilean President Sebastian Pinera has called for the resignation of top officials from the National Geological and Mining Service of Chile, the state-run mining regulatory body.

Sernageomin is now widely blamed for lax oversight of the safety issues in Chile's mining sector.

The English-language Santiago Times carried comments from distraught family members amid anger over comments by Mining Minister Laurence Golborne, who said he thought it unlikely the miners could still be alive.

Rescue teams made several unsuccessful attempts at reaching the miners trapped underground at the San Jose copper mine, near the northern Chilean city of Copiapo.

The miners were working at a depth of more than 1,475 feet when the mine collapsed overhead. Rescue officials said the miners could survive if they managed to access an underground shelter equipped with food, oxygen and water.

However, mining security experts said even if the miners reached the shelter they would now be out of supplies, as the emergency relief was good to last only 72 hours. The mine collapsed Thursday last week.

With news of the miners' safety awaited with diminishing hope, Sernageomin faces a major

shake-up and top-level sackings. The regulator's national director, a regional director and a sub-director for the area were all named in an official announcement.

"We have ordered a thorough restructuring of Sernageomin," Pinera said. "This will allow us to modernize and update services. We have information proving that there have been many failures, many errors and many omissions on their part."

Pinera met individually with the senior officials, Alejandro Vio, Rodolfo Diaz and Exequiel Yanes, to ask them to resign after he met again with Golborne and Interior Minister Rodrigo Hinzpeter.

Opposition critics called Pinera's action unfair, saying that it deflected blame from others responsible.

Sernageomin said in its defense that lack of funding had forced the organization to cut back on the number of auditors assigned the task of checking out more than 4,500 mines in Chile. It said in the region near the collapse mine alone, it had three auditors overseeing 844 mining areas, a task its workers union called "impossible."

Other critics cited by Santiago Times blamed close ties between the auditors and private sector operators of mines for lax standards in maintaining safe operation of mines.

This week in mining accident history

16 August 1900

Orbiston Colliery

Bothwell Parish, Scotland, UK

Underground coal mine

1 killed by falling coal

Source: www.scotishmining.co.uk

Fatal Accident at Orbiston Pit – A most unusual accident took place on Thursday afternoon about 2 o'clock in Old Orbiston Colliery, belonging to the Summerlee and Mossend Coy., whereby a man named James

Cowden, who was engaged as bottomer in the colliery, was in the act of disloading the cage, when a piece of coal came down the shank, and striking him on the back of the head, killed him almost instantaneously. Deceased was married, and leaves a widow and three of a family to mourn his untimely end. [Bellshill Speaker 18 August 1900]

Saturday 14 August 2010

USA: Nev. accident leaves 2 miners missing, feared dead

Extract from Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — A search was under way after an accident at an underground gold mine in northern Nevada left two miners missing and feared dead.

Barrick Gold Corp. has not confirmed any deaths following Thursday's accident at the Meikle mine, which has seen three fatalities in the past 11 years.

But a company official referred to the search as a "recovery effort" directed by the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration.

"While we don't have all of the facts at this point, what we do know about the incident is not encouraging," said Greg Lang, president of Barrick's North America region.

Lang said the initial investigation was focused on a hoist in the ventilation shaft of the mine, which is about 55 miles northwest of Elko and 275 miles northeast of Reno.

An official for MSHA in Washington, D.C., told The Associated Press that two workers were being lowered into the shaft when the hoist operator noticed a "large surge of pressure on the hoist drum" and the mine was evacuated.

The two workers "have not been located," said the official, who was not authorized to disclose the information publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The state has seen a surge in gold mining in recent years as prices skyrocketed and miners

stepped up exploration, especially along the Carlin Trend — one of the largest known ore deposits, stretching about 40 miles long and 5 miles wide in northeast Nevada.

The accident occurred at about 1:15 a.m. at the mine with about 300 workers. Toronto-based Barrick notified the missing miners' families and shut down the mine's underground operations, Lang said.

Elko police Lt. Richard Genseal said the Elko Bomb Squad was assisting in the search with a robot fitted with a camera.

The mine, which is operated by its subsidiary Barrick Goldstrike Mines, has had three deaths in three separate accidents since 1999, according to MSHA records. The most recent was in August 2004 when a truck driver was pinned between his truck and a cement pillar. Another truck driver was killed in February 2000 when he backed his water truck into an open slope, was ejected and fell 75 feet below.

In April 1999, a miner was cleaning debris from a rock blasting area, lost his footing and fell into an opening about 150 feet to his death, the MSHA records show.

Barrick, the largest gold company in the world, owns several mines in Nevada — the fourth largest producer of gold in the world behind South Africa, Australia and China.

Africa: Illegal workers found shot dead in gold mine

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Police in South Africa have begun an investigation after four men, thought to have been illegal gold miners, were shot dead and their bodies left in a disused mine.

The mine is run by a nephew of president Jacob Zuma and one of Nelson Mandela's grandsons.

Staff at the Aurora Mine, east of Johannesburg, defended their right to protect their assets against what they say are trespassers, but would not confirm whether it was the mine's own

security staff who were responsible for the killings.

It is understood there was a clash earlier in the week involving security guards and a group of illegal miners.

The mine has been the focus of environmental concerns, illegal mining and strike action by workers who claim they have not been paid for several months.

Trade union confederation Cosatu has condemned the killings and called for a full investigation.

Sunday 15 August 2010

USA: Two miners killed in Nevada mine accident identified

Extract from CNN Wire Staff

Two miners who died this week in a Nevada mining accident were identified Saturday, according to the mine's owner.

Crews late Friday found the bodies of Daniel Patrick Noel, 47, and Ethan Joel Schorr, 38, both of Spring Creek, Nevada, Barrick Gold Corp. said in a statement.

Noel is survived by a wife and three children. Schorr is survived by a wife and four children.

Their bodies were found about 1,300 feet underground, Barrick said.

The accident occurred at 1:15 a.m. (4:15 a.m. ET) on Thursday in Elko County, Nevada. According to Barrick, two miners in an elevator were inspecting a large pipe in a vertical shaft when the pipe fell into the shaft, damaging the elevator.

All underground operations at the Meikle mine were suspended, the company said.

"This is a tragic event and we remain focused on assisting these miners' families," Greg Lang, president of Barrick's North America region, said in a statement. "The hearts and prayers of every Barrick employee are with them at this time. We place great value in our coworkers'

health and safety, and we will do everything we can to prevent an incident like this from happening again."

The company said Barrick and the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration worked for more than 32 hours to reach the area where the bodies were found.

The MSHA reports at least 53 fatalities so far this year, including at least 42 coal-related deaths and at least 11 metal-related deaths

USA: W.Va. mine inquiry focuses on air cutback

Extract from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The struggle to feed two working sections from the same source of air may have played a pivotal role in the fatal blast that tore through 21/2 miles of the Upper Big Branch mine on April 5.

Investigators are poring over mine maps amid testimony that the supply of fresh air on the face of the mine's massive longwall section was roughly halved sometime in March as workers in a nearby section pressed to complete the setup for the next longwall area before the current one was exhausted.

Among the items under scrutiny, according to sources close to the investigation, is a collection of air-lock doors that witnesses have said were sometimes opened to shift air between the two sections.

The blast at the mine in Montcoal, W.Va., run by Massey Energy, followed a snowstorm of withdrawal orders and citations for unwarrantable failures of the mine's ventilation plan. An analysis of those orders and citations issued in all longwall mines operating in the United States shows that Upper Big Branch accounted for 37 withdrawal orders -- the highest number issued -- in the past two years.

"It's a known fact that Upper Big Branch had the most orders," said Kevin Stricklin, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration's head of coal oversight.

But also during that period, MSHA officials devoted fewer inspection hours to Upper Big Branch than 30 of the 40 U.S. longwall mines. Mr. Stricklin said many factors account for the difference in inspection hours, including a mine's size.

The mine with the second-highest number of withdrawal orders -- New Era/Galatia in Saline County, Ill. -- received 24 withdrawal orders over the same two-year period but had three times of hours devoted to inspections.

The numbers paint a portrait of a coal mine with a history of serious ventilation citations and more orders than any other. Yet it appeared to receive less scrutiny than most of the other longwall mines.

Ventilation is one of the most crucial aspects of mine safety because of the need to guarantee a flow of fresh air to work spaces deep inside the earth while flushing away potentially explosive methane and airborne coal dust.

Since the disastrous 2006 explosion that killed a dozen workers at the Sago Mine near Buckhannon, W.Va., Congress rushed to enact mine safety legislation calling for new standards on safety seals, underground rescue chambers and oxygen supply units deep in the earth. Mr. Stricklin and other safety officials noted, however, that too many mines, despite knowledge acquired over more than a century, fail to adhere to basic safety tenets.

"If you do the correct things and you have your basic things in places such as ventilation, rock dusting, roof control and examinations, you'll never have to use these rescue type of devices," Mr. Stricklin said.

A combination of methane and coal dust is suspected in the Upper Big Branch explosion, in which 29 men died -- the worst mining disaster in 40 years.

State and federal investigators probing the blast, along with FBI agents who have opened a parallel criminal investigation, are focusing on what some witnesses have said was an abrupt

fall in the amount of air crossing the face of the longwall a month before the explosion. Sources with direct access to information on the closed-door interviews said coal company employees stated airflow dropped from 100,000 cubic feet per minute to roughly 50,000 cubic feet per minute.

Investigators believe the mine's air supply problem stemmed from a circuitous route taken by fresh intake air and the competing demands of both the longwall -- where coal was being cut -- and the 22 Headgate and 22 Tailgate areas -- the so-called "development" section where miners were racing to have entryways cut for the next massive harvest when the current longwall was to be exhausted around the end of May. With the longwall cutting complete and a new section not yet developed, the mine's massive cutting equipment could sit idle, slowing coal production.

"You like to have a photo finish. If your longwall panel is finished and there's no place for that big boy to go, usually somebody's in trouble," said Ron Wooten, director of the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training.

Investigators now are looking at a series of doors set up inside the mine that appear to have been used to shift airflow and whether those shifts required advance approval. Under federal regulations a major air change -- usually meaning a shift of 9,000 cubic feet per minute or more -- constitutes a change in the ventilation plan and, under law, must be approved by MSHA's district director.

Upper Big Branch was dotted with doors, including double sets designed to provide air locks that would prevent a shift in the flow of air, as well as others marked as regulators -- doors specifically designed to allow a modification in the flow of air.

In January, these doors became the focus of an order issued by federal inspectors who cited the mine for a shift in airflow they declared "reasonably likely" to cause injury or death. The

return air course -- the air taking gases out of the mine -- was entering a secondary escape route used by workers on the longwall section.

"This air," the order notes, "is used to ventilate the face of the active longwall section."

The action taken to terminate this violation, according to the order: "A door was shut on the No. 2 section and air returned to the direction shown on the approved map." The description in the citation strongly suggests that air was somehow being swapped between the longwall and the development section.

"We've talked to miners who worked there and said, 'I worked on the section, and we were always calling for air,' " said Dennis O'Dell, director of safety for the United Mine Workers union.

The movement of air in that fashion, said Pittsburgh lawyer Bruce Stanley, is consistent with what he said he found when he represented the widows of two men who died at another Massey Mine, Aracoma Coal Co.'s Alma No. 1 mine in Logan County, W.Va.

"They supposedly have their air-lock doors," Mr. Stanley said. "The doors are supposed to be shut at all times in order to create the barriers to facilitate the ventilation plan. Regularly, they would be left open, locked open, to feed air."

Massey has sparred with MSHA over ventilation plans, and the company last month filed suit challenging MSHA's ability to dictate those plans. Massey officials have said that MSHA's forced changes to its ventilation plan reduced the flow of air, which MSHA disputes.

MSHA has said it does not dictate plans, and approves or rejects them depending if they comply with the law. In the case of Upper Big Branch in the last year, those plans often did not.

In September 2009 and again in March, MSHA ventilation experts said surprise inspections showed air was moving in the wrong direction across the longwall face.

According to an agency memo, those were two of 23 citations MSHA handed out at Upper Big Branch for failing to follow the mine's ventilation plan or making unapproved changes to it between September and the fatal blast April 5.

Upper Big Branch miners have added to the ventilation concerns. At a May field hearing of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee in Beckley, W.Va., Upper Big Branch miner Stanley "Goose" Stewart, who barely escaped the explosion, testified to persistent ventilation problems on the longwall.

"Mine management never fully addressed the air problem when it would be shut down by inspectors," Mr. Stewart testified. "They would fix it just good enough to get us to load coal again, but then it would be back to business as usual. The longwall worried me because of the ventilation."

Steve Morgan, father of 21-year-old Adam, who died in the explosion, testified that his son frequently spoke of ventilation problems in the mine. A trainee, Adam Morgan often would hang curtains on his own to direct airflow in the longwall section.

"He said, 'Ain't these curtains supposed to be up?' " Steve Morgan said. "I said they have to be up to make sure all the ventilation is right. Just about every shift he worked he had to do some kind of ventilation repair."

Wednesday 18 August 2010

USA: MSHA - Massey didn't report accidents at W.Va. mine

Extract from Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Government investigators have cited Massey Energy for failing to report more than 20 accidents at its Upper Big Branch coal mine in the two years before an April explosion killed 29 miners there, according to documents released by the Mine Safety and Health Administration on Tuesday.

Just four of the alleged violations directly involve the explosion. The rest occurred between January 2008 and early this year. Among other things, they involve unreported roof collapses, assorted injuries and two instances of miners exercising their right to move out of dusty areas of the mine because they've contracted black lung disease.

All were supposed to be reported. MSHA said the citations were issued because the agency did not learn of the violations until it performed an audit stemming from its investigation of the explosion. The blast also is the subject of a federal criminal investigation.

Massey is reviewing the citations and records at its other operations to determine why violations may not have been reported, spokesman Jeff Gillenwater said. Massey operates dozens of coal mines in West Virginia, Kentucky and Virginia.

"We agree with some citations and disagree with others," Gillenwater said.

Four miners were unable to work after the explosion. The citations offer few details about why. The documents say only that the "incident" on April 5 resulted in lost time and was not reported as required.

At least one Upper Big Branch miner has said during congressional testimony that he's been emotionally unable to work since the explosion.

Other citations allege Massey failed to report a variety of accidents resulting in injuries, including one that "resulted in temporary total disability," and others that required miners to miss work, get stitches and even nurse a fracture.

The citations raise new questions about Massey's safety record. The company routinely points out that its rate of serious accidents that cause miners to miss work is among the best in the industry.

Gillenwater said it is company policy to report all accidents to MSHA if required.

A United Mine Workers official said the report confirms what the union has long heard.

"It comes as no surprise that Massey has been found not to have reported injuries and accidents," UMW spokesman Phil Smith said. The union represents a small number of Massey employees, but has been a frequent critic of the company through a series of labor disputes.

"We've been hearing stories about this a long time," Smith said. "This is not the stuff of rumors. This is the stuff of fact."

Separately, MSHA said Tuesday it is fining a Massey Energy subsidiary more than \$542,000 for violations that contributed to a fatal accident at a Virginia mine in 2009.

Among other things, Big Laurel Mining is accused of failing to follow the roof control plan at its No. 2 underground mine when a massive chunk of rock fell on 58-year-old miner William Parrott. The rock was more than 26 feet long and up to 5 feet thick.

The accident occurred Aug. 20, 2009, when the mine was owned by Cumberland Resources, which Massey acquired in April.

MSHA says other violations included inadequate safety examinations of the area where the accident occurred.

USA: Rescue crews recover bodies of trapped miners at Meikle Mine

Extract from The Ely Times

Barrick Mine rescue crews recovered the bodies of two miners killed in an Aug. 13 accident at the Meikle Underground Mine in northeastern Nevada.

The two miners, Daniel Patrick Noel, 47, and Ethan Joel Schorr, 38, were both of Spring Creek, Nev.

The fatal accident occurred at about 1:15 a.m. PST Aug. 12 in the ventilation shaft at the Meikle Underground Mine at Barrick's Goldstrike Operations.

Noel and Schorr were inspecting a large pipe in the vertical shaft at the time of the accident. The elevator carrying the two miners was damaged when the pipe fell into the shaft. All underground operations at Goldstrike were immediately suspended and recovery activities began promptly with the assistance of Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) officials. There were about 160 employees in the mine at the time of the accident. Barrick's management team notified the family members of the missing miners soon after the incident and provided them with information and support throughout the recovery operation.

"This is a tragic event and we remain focused on assisting these miners' families," said Greg Lang, President of Barrick's North America Region. "The hearts and prayers of every Barrick employee are with them at this time. We place great value in our coworkers' health and safety and we will do everything we can to prevent an incident like this from happening again."

Barrick crews and MSHA officials worked for more than 32 hours to safely access the area where the miners were found, about 1,300 feet below the surface. A variety of methods were used to evaluate damage in the shaft and to determine a safe means of access.

"We truly appreciate the support of the many people in the community and organizations that offered assistance during this difficult time," Randy Buffington, Goldstrike General Manager, said. "We owe special thanks to our colleagues at Newmont, Great Basin Gold, the Elko County Sheriff's Office and the Elko Police Department. I would also like to thank everyone at Goldstrike for their professional and appropriate response to this tragedy."

Noel is survived by a wife and three children. Schorr is survived by a wife and four children.

Underground operations at Goldstrike were suspended following the accident and will remain so until all investigations are completed.

Goldstrike is a large gold mining operation located about 50 miles northwest of Elko.

Sudan gold mine collapses, kills 10

Extract from the Independent Online

Khartoum - Ten people were killed after a mine collapsed in a desert region of northern Sudan that is currently in the grip of a gold rush, the interior ministry said on Wednesday.

"Ten people are dead following the collapse at a small gold mine at Kabkabah village in the Abu Hamed sector," a ministry statement quoted Nile state police chief Adel Khujly al-Jak as saying.

Rising gold prices combined with the availability of metal detectors has sparked a gold rush in northern Sudan, with thousands of prospectors descending on the area in recent years in the hope of striking it rich.

Several reports have appeared in the Khartoum papers about deadly accidents, usually citing anonymous sources. Prospectors from the north often come to the capital to sell gold in the large Al-Arabi souk.

"For the past two years prospectors have been coming to us to sell gold," Mahdi, a jeweller in the market, told AFP. "Sometimes they have 100 grammes, 250 grammes or even a kilo or more.

"Here in Khartoum we have cash to buy their gold, whereas in the north the merchants have less liquidity."

Thursday 19 August 2010

NSW: Hunter Valley safety experts to brief Chinese mining officials

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Chinese mining officials have enlisted the help of Hunter Valley safety experts to improve China's horror mine safety record.

Local mining organisation Coal Services will brief the Chinese officials on how to improve

safety and use simulator training to prepare workers for dangerous situations.

An average of 13 people die every day in Chinese mines.

Coal Services spokesman Kevin O'Brien says Australia is regarded as a world leader in mine safety.

"[We're] looking to export some of our safety techniques into China," he said.

"It's called the Coal Safety project.

"The issue is that the Chinese are where we were perhaps 50 years ago. They don't have the same series of legislative covers that our New South Wales Government has got; they don't have the same level of training that we've got."

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

W

Wilfley tables

Perhaps the most common form of *concentrating table* used at Australian gold mines. Wilfley tables, invented in 1844, had a slightly sloping table top, linoleum coated, with timber *riffles* of gradually reducing size attached to its length. The table was shaken and water and crushed ore poured down it, the fractions of the mixture being sorted by weight as they travelled across the table.



The 10-head stamper battery looms at the back of the shed, with the first set of amalgamation tables leading the residues onto the Wilfley tables in the foreground, all powered by the steam engine on the right. Wentworth Mine, Lucknow, NSW

Mining history in pictures



Fire investigation team wearing Proto breathing apparatus at the CSA Mine near Cobar, NSW in 1920. L to R, A. J. Julius - Mine manager, Gwyder Whalen - surveyor & Bob Pivetta - underground foreman. (Photo courtesy www.dpi.nsw.gov.au)



Underground mining was hard on man and beast alike. Until electricity became cheaply available, miner and mule laboured together to move rock to the surface. A good example of the bond that developed is a popular poem from the period, "My Sweatheart is a mule in the mine." Bisbee Arizona, USA (Photo Courtesy Bisbee Mining & Historical Museum)



Graphite mining in Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic, circa 1920

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