



# Mining Accident News No.1024

20 to 26 August 2010

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## Friday 20 August 2010

### Africa: Woman killed in mining accident

*Extract from www.iol.co.za*

A woman died in a mining accident outside Rustenburg on Thursday, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) said.

A locomotive operator, the woman was found dead under a locomotive at a ventilation door in Lonmin's Rowland shaft on Thursday afternoon, said NUM spokesperson Lesiba Seshoka.

"The NUM appreciates the effort of the company in coming forward to report rather than trying to hide the accident as it usually happens with other mining houses," Seshoka said.

He said the union reiterated its call on the mining industry to seriously work towards zero fatalities in deeds, rather than lip service.

The union regretted the death and conveyed condolences to the operator's family. It called for a thorough investigation into the accident.

Lonmin could not immediately confirm the incident.

### USA: Man flown out after accident at mine

*Extract from the Charleston Gazette*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A man was flown out by helicopter after apparently being run over at an eastern Kanawha County mine on Thursday evening.

A Kanawha County Metro 911 dispatcher said the man was run over by a Chevrolet S-10 pickup truck on Clean Coal Mine property near East Bank at about 5:30 p.m. The man was taken by helicopter to a local hospital.

Further details were unavailable this morning.

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

## Update:

*Extract from WSAZ*

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Mine Safety Officials have released more information about an employee who was injured on mine property Thursday.

According to a news release, an employee of Bulldog Excavating was injured on Coal Clean Corporation property around 5:45 p.m. That's along Wet Branch Road near East Bank.

Bulldog Excavating was hired by Coal Clean Corporation to build a road.

Public Information Specialist Leslie Fitzwater tells WSAZ.com the man had completed his shift when an employee of Bulldog backed his truck into him.

The victim's injuries were not life threatening.

The accident is under investigation.

The name of the victim has not been released.

Saturday 21 August 2010

## Two dead, 23 injured in coal mine blast in Xinjiang

*Extract from China.org.cn*

Two people were killed and another left missing while 23 were injured in a gas blast at a coal mine in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Friday, local authorities said Saturday.

The accident occurred at around 8 p.m. Friday in Hami City after a team attempted to extinguish an underground fire at the mine, said the municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China in a statement.

All 23 injured miners were hospitalized, and three of them were in critical conditions, said the statement.

The miners working underground when the fire broke out were all lifted to safety.

The mine was operated by Lu'an Xinjiang Coal Chemical Industry Co. Ltd.

The company, founded in 2007 with capital of 1.5 billion yuan (220 million U.S. dollars), has an annual coal output of 5 million tonnes.

Sunday 22 August 2010

## Chilean crew reaches place of possible rescue, hear noises but uncertainty remains

*Extract from Buenos Aires Herald*

Chilean rescue teams managed to reach through a pipeline of eight inches in diameter at the area where 33 Chilean miners are trapped in a copper mine in the Atacama Desert since August 5.

"They said there were signs of life, they heard sounds," a miner who works in the rescue operation said.

The operation could still take months according to the Chilean government. The drilling advanced 688 meters into the depths of the earth, and presumably reached to a workshop that was built inside the San José copper mine.

The Chilean Mining Minister Laurence Golborne, told reporters, "We must be cautious, we should not spread rumours," the official insisted, explaining that there is still no communication with the miners and no certainty if they are alive.

Golborne also explained that "there is some happiness due to having reached a place of possible rescue." But he also said that "there is nothing concrete yet", and added, "The noises that rescuers heard could have been produced by the same drilling machinery or loose stones."

The minister also indicated that the President Sebastián Piñera "is permanently informed of what's happening."

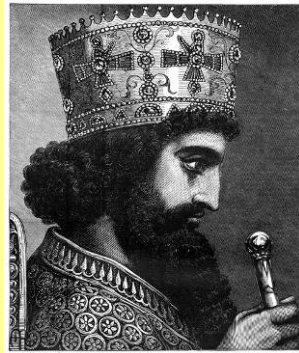
Rescuers are now working to assemble and insert a tube through the hole to prevent it from collapsing due to the fault line that has the reservoir. Through the pipeline, the government hopes to provide water, food and supplies to the

miners, who could be at a warehouse shelter about 700 metres underground.

Engineer Miguel Fort said that all works are being done "with great caution", thus referring to the difficulties faced by the operation (the largest and most complex rescue in the history of the Andean country) so far.

Establish contact with the trapped miners, in case they are alive, will take hours since it is necessary to first ensure the hole made and then insert a TV camera through it and make it go almost 700 metres down.

### Quote of the week



"Only by great risks can great results be achieved."

Xerxes  
(Persia, 4<sup>th</sup> Zoroastrian king of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire, 519-465BC)

Monday 23 August 2010

## Qld: International experts gather for mining safety conference

*Extract from ABC Online, Aus*

Organisers of a mining safety conference being held in Townsville in north Queensland over the next three days say it is one of the largest in the world.

More than 700 delegates are attending the event to discuss the best safety practices for the mining industry to adopt over the next few years.

Conference spokesman Stewart Bell says a group of international experts is sharing ideas on

how to reach the goal of 'zero harm' for workers in the state's mines.

"Queensland has probably the best mine safety and health record in the world, but it's not perfect," he said.

"We're still hurting people, we're still having problems.

"What we're looking at now is human behaviour - how people behave in situations where they might hurt themselves or other people.

"We're also looking at new technologies to make our equipment safer and new health monitoring techniques to make sure we're not exposing our people to anything they shouldn't be exposed to."

Mr Bell says its success is based on the support from all areas of the mining industry.

"It's supported by the unions, by the mining employers, by the regulators and by the Government," he said.

"It's very important that we keep all of those three groups on the same train."

## Chilean miners alive but facing months underground

*Extract from ABC Online, Aus*

Thirty-three miners trapped underground for more than two weeks after a cave-in said they were all alive in a message tied to a drill, Chilean authorities said on Sunday.

President Sebastian Pinera said the piece of paper was tied to a drill that rescuers used to bore through to the area where the miners are located. But he said it will take months to get the trapped miners out.

"The 33 of us in the shelter are well," read the message.

"It will take months [to get them out]. It will take time, but it doesn't matter how long it takes, but to have a happy ending," the president said.

Relatives hugged and kissed as news of the message reverberated outside the entrance to

the mine, where they have been camped out since the mine caved in on August 5.

Rescuers plan to send plastic tubes down the narrow borehole with food, hydration gels and communications equipment. Deep in the mine, there are deposits of water and ventilation shafts that could help the miners survive.

Mining minister Laurence Golborne said rescue workers would lower a camera and microphones in a bid to locate and contact the miners.

The miners are seven kilometres inside the winding mine and about 700 metres vertically underground.

Rescue workers say it could take 120 days to dig a new tunnel to reach the miners after the main mine ramp collapsed.

The government said earlier this month that the likelihood of finding the miners alive was low.

Mr Pinera sacked top officials of Chile's mining regulator and vowed a major overhaul of the agency in light of the accident.

Serious mining accidents are rare in Chile, but the government says the San Jose mine, owned by local private company Compania Minera San Esteban Primera, has suffered a series of mishaps and 16 workers were killed in recent years.

## **Sudan: Mining accident kills 5, injures 6 in North Kordofan**

*Extract from [www.radiodabanga.org](http://www.radiodabanga.org)*

Five people were killed and six others injured in a mining accident on Jebel Al Takeelaat in Sodere Locality of North Kordofan. A local source said that a group of local young people came from the Fursan region to work in mining, searching for gold in the region. Rocks collapsed on them at approximately ten o'clock last Monday night, resulting in the deaths of five of them on the spot.

## **Chile mine disaster brings back memories for Tasmanian miner**

*Extract from The Guardian, VIC, Aus*

For Todd Russell, the plight of the 33 Chilean miners trapped in the San Jose mine has brought memories of the ordeal he went through in 2006. Russell, 34, and Brant Webb, 37, were caught in a safety cage almost a kilometre below the surface when an earthquake triggered a rockfall in the Beaconsfield gold mine in northern Tasmania. The two men were feared dead until emergency crews using a thermal imaging camera located them five days later. Here he describes to Alison Rourke the two weeks they spent trapped underground.

"We were stuck underground for 14 days in a small pocket of air. We couldn't stand up or even sit up. We had to lie down on our backs. If one of us was on our back, the other had to lie on his side for 14 days. We were tossing and turning on sharp rocks and being cut to pieces. We were really worried about the cuts getting infected.

"We had no food or water for the first six days. The only thing Brant had was a muesli bar which we shared between us for that first six days.

We were really worried about dehydrating because it was 29 degrees down in the mine day and night. We had to urinate into our helmets so we could collect something to drink.

"We were never confident that they were going to get us out alive. We just had to rely on each other and keep positive. That's probably the best thing those miners in Chile can do to keep themselves alive. They should think of their families and loved ones and rely on their mates around them to get them through.

"Brant and I relied on each other's strengths. We bounced off each other and relied on each other for the whole 14 days. We made up stories and sang songs just to take our mind off things and tried to put our minds into a positive state.

"It was very dark down there of course but we did have some reserve lighting. It was also very hot and humid down there but, because of the flow through of air from fans that were blowing through into the level we were on, we were also suffering from hypothermia (because of the cold air blowing on our sweat). We had to cuddle each other to keep our body cores warm. We didn't have any communication with anyone for the first six days. We just tried to remain positive and hoped that what they did on the outside wouldn't kill us. We knew that the guys were working their way towards us. We could hear everything that was happening outside us and we could hear the underground machinery operating.

We knew that they were coming but whether they thought we were alive or whether they thought they were coming to do a body recovery was another thing. We weren't found alive until day six.

"I personally don't think the miners in Chile will recover from this. We will never recover from our experience either. Life for us now is easier than it was four years ago but you've always got the constant memory with you for the whole of your life. It's going to be very hard for those guys and also their families because the families don't know from day to day whether their loved ones are going to survive the four months or whether they're going to perish where they are.

"That's the same sort of thing that happened with our families. For Brant and me the first four to six days were OK because we knew we were alive but for the families on the outside they didn't have any idea whether we were alive or not."



EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO HOLD MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTABLE

## This week in mining accident history

**23 August 1935**

**South Kirkby Colliery**

**Yorkshire, Scotland, UK**

**Underground coal mine**

**10 killed, gas explosions**

Source: [www.dmm-pitwork.org.uk](http://www.dmm-pitwork.org.uk)

On the evening of the 22nd August 1935, 22 men (including George William Beaman) were employed in building two stoppings in the Barnsley seam.

Two small explosions had occurred at approximately 10.30p.m., these were believed to have been caused by a gob fire resulting from spontaneous combustion. The stoppings were being built to seal off the affected area. This incident was reported to have taken place some 1¾ miles from pit bottom.

At 3.00 p.m. in afternoon of the 23rd. a third explosion in the area of the stoppings resulted in men being seriously burned. Three of the others, who had rescue apparatus, at once started to look for and help the injured, ten of whom were carried out of the district alive, but only one of these eventually recovered. During the progress of these operations some of the rescuers were considerably affected by fumes.

It was later found that one man (Frank Dale) was still missing and at 4.0 p.m. a search for him was renewed by Norman Baster, the colliery agent, with the manager and four rescue men. When Frank Dale was found he was dead.

A further explosion (at about 5.50 p.m.) then occurred while bringing Dale out on a stretcher; all six members of the rescue party suffered burns and those nearer the shaft who were looking after the men first injured, were also affected. At this point the rescuers left the body and returned to surface except for Charles Ball who had been injured in the third blast, he was somehow left behind. A party of 4 rescuers including Norman Baster and George Beaman went back inbye and recovered the body of

Frank Dale and then made a return trip even further inbye in search of Charles Ball.

Baster had no breathing apparatus and was eventually so much affected by fumes and also suffering from fatigue he had to retire,

George Beaman and one other rescuer went even further in search of Ball but without success. Apparently at this point an erroneous report that Ball had reached the surface safely was made and it was not realised to be incorrect until sometime later.

At 10.0 p.m. that night a further rescue party led by James Pollitt under great risk of the cumulating threat of an even greater explosion managed to find Ball and brought him to the surface.

During these operations, which involved repeated journeys to and from the face, and some of the rescuers who were not equipped with special apparatus were considerably affected by fumes. They all displayed great courage and pertinacity.

Three Edward Medals were awarded on that day to :-

- Norman Baster. (retired to Canada and was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977).
- George Beaman. (Edward Medal translated to the George Cross in 1971).
- James Pollitt. (Edward Medal translated to the George Cross).

The Edward medals were presented by King Edward V111 at Buckingham Palace on the 15th of July 1936.

From reading the above accounts many more awards could have been made.

Names of men killed:

- G. Bannister, aged 54, occupation Collier.
- F. Baugh, aged 33. occupation Hewer.
- J. Goodwin, aged 26, occupation Dataller.
- J. T. Hancox, aged 26, occupation Dataller.
- J. D. Jefferson, aged 59, occupation Deputy.

J. Newton, aged 25, occupation Dataller.

J. Stevenson, aged 24, occupation Collier.

A. Walstow, aged 54, occupation Dataller.

W. Woodall, aged 26, occupation Corporal.

F. Dale, aged 44, Asst. Supervisor Central Rescue Station.

Frank Dale was from the Wakefield Mines Rescue Station. It was his day off, but he went to help. (In commemoration, a large silver chalice was made, with his name on it. This was used as a prize in Mines Rescue competitions, and was called the 'Dale Rose Bowl').

Tuesday 24 August 2010

## Two die in Siberian coal mine accident

*Extract from Rianovosti, Russia*

Two miners were killed when a roof collapsed in the Voroshilov coal mine in Russia's western Siberian town of Prokopyevsk in Kemerovo region, the local press service said on Tuesday.

Earlier reports said there was no information about the missing miners.

"According to preliminary information, the roof collapsed during a hydraulic mining operation. Twelve miners were working at the site, 10 managed to escape without assistance. The search for the two missing is underway," an official from the regional press service said.

Later, the press service said both miners had been found dead.



[Two die in Siberian coal mine accident](#)

Voroshilov coal mine is affiliated with Prokopyevskugol mining company, owned by SDS-Ugol mining holding company.

Mining accidents are common in Russia's aging coal mines. On May 8 and 9, coal mine blast ripped through the Rapsadskaya coalmine in the town of Mezhdurechensk, also in Kemerovo region. Sixty-seven bodies have been recovered from the mine and another 23 miners are still registered as missing.

On Sunday a victim of the blast, who was in hospital for more than four months, died, bringing the official death toll to 68.

## **Vic: Mine worker faces fine over teenager's death**

*Extract from ABC Online, Aus*

A man who ran over a teenager at the Ballarat Gold Mine with a 40-tonne truck, had only been driving the vehicle for three days.



A man who ran over a teenager at the Ballarat Gold Mine with a 40-tonne truck is facing a hefty fine. (ABC Local: Margaret Burin)

37-year-old Robert Strucell has pleaded guilty to failing to take reasonable care of others.

He was giving 17-year-old Damien Tuddenham a lift back to his worksite after morning tea, in a 40-tonne truck.

As the teenager climbed out of the truck, he slipped on the staircase and fell to the ground.

Strucell, who had three days experience in the truck, checked his mirrors and put the truck into gear.

It rolled onto Damien Tuddenham and he died at the scene.

The Ballarat Magistrates Court heard there was no safety procedure in place for transporting employees to and from their breaks.

Strucell's defence lawyer told the court his client had little experience driving such trucks and that Damien Tuddenham was his first passenger.

Strucell is facing a maximum fine of about \$56,000.

He will be sentenced on Thursday.

## **Trapped Chilean Miners' First Request: Toothbrushes**

*Extract from ABC News, USA*

In perhaps an incidental sign of the long stay to come, the 33 miners trapped 2,258 feet below ground in Chile reportedly made an unusual first request when they were contacted by rescuers: Send toothbrushes.

They made the request, reported today by the Associated Press, as rescuers drilled a second six-inch-wide hole to the trapped miners to communicate with them via scribbled notes.

Standing near the entrance of the collapsed mine, Chile's minister of mines, Laurence Golborne, told "Good Morning America," in comments airing today, that there has never been a rescue effort in Chile as long as this one could be. Government officials have said the miners may not surface until around Christmas.

### **Related**

Although the rescue effort is a slow, deliberate process, Gov. Joe Manchin of West Virginia -- a

state widely known for its dependence on the mining industry and experience in substantial mine rescue operations -- is hopeful the Chilean government's estimate is conservative.

"They'll get through this. I'll bet we get them out quicker than that," Manchin told "GMA."

In coming days, rescuers hope to drill a third small hole to help pump in oxygen and plan to send a microphone down so the miners can talk to their families.

The miners, already trapped for 17 days before their discovery Sunday, managed to stay alive by rationing a 48-hour emergency supply of food.

Each man was allowed two spoons of tuna, a biscuit and a sip of milk, once every two days.

After seven failed attempts, rescuers finally drilled a six-inch hole down to where the men are holed up Monday. When the drill came back to the surface, two notes were attached to it, one from the eldest of the miners, 63-year-old Mario Gomez. He wrote to his wife, translated from Spanish, "I want to tell everyone that I'm good and we'll surely come out OK."

Gomez's wife, Lila Ramirez, told "GMA" she will wait as long as necessary to see her husband but will never allow him to go back into a mine after he comes up.

When the mine collapsed Aug. 5, the men journeyed down seven miles of zigzagging tunnels, 2,258 feet to get to the mine's shelter.

Now, the hole that let the world know the men are still alive will be used to sustain them. Engineers coated the walls of the bore-hole with a metallic gel to help reinforce the hole and make it easier for rescuers and family to send the men materials.

The men are surviving under grueling conditions, entombed in a space that's just 600 square feet, the size of a hotel room. The temperature: a sweltering 95 degrees with 95 percent humidity.

They have a little electricity from a truck engine. They have dug into the dirt floor of the mine with a backhoe to reach tiny amounts of water to drink, but they reportedly only had food for two days. "People may say this is not successful because these men are trapped," Ellen Smith, managing editor of Mine Safety & Health News, said Monday. "I say this is incredibly successful because these men survived and they will be able to survive."

Using a hose, rescue workers are sending down packages called "palomas," Spanish for pigeons. Each paloma takes an hour to reach the men.

So far, they've sent down salted water to hydrate the men, gel tablets with nutrition as well as medicine to help nurse the men back from the brink of starvation.

They will also lower oxygen and questionnaires for the men to fill out about their health.

#### **Mental Health of Miners**

While nutrients and oxygen are needed to keep the men alive, many are worried about their mental health, holding up at the prospect of months spent thousands of feet below ground.

"They need to understand what we know up here at the surface, that it will take many weeks for them to reach the light," Chile's Health Minister Jaime Manalich said.

Rescuers plan to send small microphones down the hole to allow the men to speak with their families during the long wait. To rescue the trapped miners, workers will try to dig a wider 27-inch shaft directly to the men. The men would be raised up one at a time. Two of the miners, however, are obese and it's not clear how they will fit. Rescuers hope the men will lose weight in the mine to fit through the hole.

The miners seem to sense the journey ahead of them. In the note to his wife, Mario Gomez scrawled, translated from Spanish, "patience and faith, God is great and the help of my God is



going to make it possible to leave this mine alive."

## 6 killed, 2 injured in Venezuela mining accident

*Extract from Bloomberg Businessweek*

Unstable soil gave way at an abandoned gold mine being worked illegally by wildcat miners, killing six miners and injuring two, officials said Tuesday.

The accident occurred as the men were using jackhammers to dig four tunnels, Mining Minister Jose Khan said on state television. He said the earth, which had been loosened by rains, gave way and buried the men.

Soldiers had ordered a group of about 40 illegal miners out of the site in southeastern Bolivar state, but a group of them worked on during Monday night, when the accident occurred, Khan said.

The group had no permission to work at the site, the closed Tomi mine near El Callao, Khan said.

The government has used troops in recent months to try to crack down on illegal mining operations, many of them for gold, in the forests of southern Venezuela.

President Hugo Chavez has called for an investigation, Khan said.

The Tomi mine used to be operated by Toronto-based Crystallex International Corp., which says on its website that it ceased mining at the site in 2008 while handing over the associated Revemin mill to a state-owned company, Minerven.

Chavez, whose government has nationalized businesses in industries such as steel and electricity, has also moved to assert greater control over the mining industry.

## Feds find egregious safety violations at US mines

*Extract from Reuters Africa*

NEW YORK, - More than four months after the worst U.S. mining accident in decades, federal mine officials have uncovered safety violations during surprise inspections at four underground coal mines, the Mine Safety and Health Administration said on Tuesday.

"It is appalling that our inspectors continue to find such egregious violations, especially with the explosion at Upper Big Branch still fresh in everyone's minds," said Joseph Main, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health.

The mine inspections in the last three weeks came as MSHA investigates the explosion that killed 29 miners at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia on April 5 -- the worst U.S. mine accident in 40 years.

"MSHA will continue to target mines with enhanced inspections ... particularly at mines that display a disregard to miners' safety and health," Main said.

The federal agency said it carried out "impact inspections" recently at four coal mining operations in three states "where unsafe practices and conditions are suspected."

It said inspectors commandeered company phones to prevent surface personnel from notifying workers underground of the inspections, which occurred during shifts when MSHA enforcement personnel were least expected.

"The inspectors found numerous violations including failure to follow the mines' approved ventilation plan, inadequate roof support and accumulation of combustible materials," it said in a news release.

"The conditions found at these mines ... underscores the importance of the program information bulletins on ventilation the agency recently circulated throughout the mining industry, as well as the need for the legislative reforms pending before Congress," Main said.

As a result of the inspections, MSHA issued 27 citations and 11 orders requiring a plan to

correct hazards at Wilcoal Mining Inc's Tri-State One Mine in Claiborne County, Tennessee.

An inspection at K&D Mining Inc's Mine No. 17 in Harlan County, Kentucky, resulted in 15 citations and five orders being issued, and inspectors issued 21 citations and 10 orders to Maple Eagle No. 1 Mine in Fayette County, West Virginia.

There was no immediate comment from Wilcoal or London-based Coal International Plc, which operates Maple Eagle. K&D Mining could not be reached.

MSHA said the visit to International Coal Group's Knott County LLC, Classic Mine in Knott County, Kentucky, resulted in 43 citations and one order.

There was no immediate comment from ICG. The company's stock ended 3.4 percent lower on Tuesday, a day when most coal company stocks fell along with the broader market.

Wednesday 25 August 2010

## **Hazards of Long Confinement**

*Extract from the New York Times*

Two mine safety experts assess problems that could arise for the trapped miners in Chile.

J. Davitt McAteer is a prominent mine-safety consultant who led the Mine Safety and Health Administration during the Clinton Administration.

His first concern is sanitation: airborne and water contamination, as well as the volume of waste from 33 people over weeks and months in a confined situation. Worse, sickness is bound to occur in a group that large over a long period.

The psychological dynamic could be volatile, especially if miners get sick. Mr. McAteer couldn't recall examples of miners being trapped for more than 25 days; with no industry experience in confinement lasting months, there are no experts on it. To stem anxiety, the miners could organize themselves for their long confinement, emphasizing cooperation and ways to pass the time.

Tony Opegard is a former Mine Safety and Health Administration official and now a mine safety lawyer.

Mr. Opegard worries that all of the miners will face post-traumatic stress disorder, no matter the outcome of the rescue efforts. No one, he said, should assume that any miners will emerge in good mental health. Anything that will bring light to the mine will help; other miners have had to dwell in total darkness before their rescues.

Unlike many previous disasters, the Chilean miners have the advantage of contact with the outside world throughout their ordeal. The more, the better, he said, like back-and-forth letters between miners and their families and friends, and photos of them.

## **USA: Wildcat mining a world danger, experts say**

*Extract from UPI.com*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa., -- The mining accident in Chile that has trapped 33 miners underground has drawn attention to the worldwide problem of wildcat, or illegal, mining, experts say.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Mineral Resources Program says illegal mines and mining practices happen around the world, including in the United States, but they are particularly prevalent in China, India, Indonesia and parts of Africa, LiveScience.com reported Wednesday.

Explosions and tunnel collapses can happen even when regulated companies with vast experience and resources are mining, Phil Smith, director of communications for the United Mine Workers of America, said.

"The chances of somebody eventually getting seriously injured or killed are close to 100 percent," when mining is conducted outside of regulations and with few or no resources to maintain safety, he said.

Wildcat mine operations have no state or federal inspectors to check a mine is safe, and worker training is often unstructured and done on the

job, resulting in injuries and disasters, Mark Radomsky, director of the miner training program at Penn State University, said.

Wildcat mining can also refer to mines that have the required authorization to dig but also support illicit mining activity. Mines like these may allow digging to go deeper than allowed or not follow required safety protocols.

Thursday 26 August 2010

## **Tas: Coroner says miner's death avoidable**

*Extract from ABC Online, Aus*

A Tasmanian Coroner has found the death of a coal miner at Fingal almost a decade ago was avoidable.

Adrian Brian Hayes died at the Cornwall underground coal mine in October 2000 when a piece of mudstone fell from a roof and struck him in the head.

Mr Hayes was 32 and had been working at the mine for about two years.

Coroner Rod Chandler's 30-page report indicates that in the weeks leading up to the accident, other miners had been injured in six separate rockfalls, four of them close to where Mr Hayes died.

Mr Chandler said the incidents were not investigated and the miner was killed because managers failed to appreciate the area was unsafe.

He also found inaction on the part of the safety regulator, Workplace Standards, was also a factor.

The Workplace Relations Minister, David O'Byrne, says Cabinet is to consider new legislation regarding mine safety in coming weeks.

He says there are now five mining inspectors in Tasmania, three more than at the time of Mr Hayes' death.

## **USA: Feds - Don't tip off miners on surprise inspections**

*Extract from the Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Some mine companies are tipping off their underground workers before federal officials make surprise inspections, an illegal practice that has become more prevalent since a West Virginia explosion killed 29 miners, the nation's top mine official said Thursday.

"We're looking at this as a chronic problem without question," Mine Safety and Health Administration director Joe Main told The Associated Press. "We have found enough evidence to know that we need to act to beef-up enforcement of the law to prevent this advance notice."

Main's comments came as his agency issued a special guidance bulletin to mines around the country clarifying the ban on giving advance notice of inspections.

The government has stepped up surprise inspections nationwide in the wake of the April explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia. Some workers at the mine testified that managers found ways to tip off miners ahead of time so they could pass inspections.

Massey officials have denied issuing any illegal warnings, but the company faces civil and criminal investigations.

Advance notice could give miners anywhere from 10 minutes to more than an hour to hide safety problems such as improper ventilation or disabled methane monitors while inspectors make their way from the main office to locations thousands of feet underground.

To combat the problem, MSHA has turned to more aggressive tactics like commandeering the phones as soon as inspectors arrive or driving up in cars the mine company won't immediately recognize. But it's become a dangerous cat-and-mouse game as some mines post lookouts

or install infrared beams that alert them when anyone enters the property.

"At some of these mines, there's just one long dirt road where they can see you coming," said Eddie Sparks, MSHA's acting assistant district manager for enforcement in Barbourville, Ky. "Some of the coal truck drivers can get on the radio and call ahead before you ever get to the mine."

Sparks said that's what happened on April 19 when inspectors drove up to Manalapan Mining Co.'s RB No. 12 mine in Harlan County, Ky. Inspectors monitoring CB radio heard truck drivers alerting the company.

At another inspection the same day, MSHA officials seized control of phone lines as soon as they arrived at Left Fork Mining Co.'s Straight Creek No. 1 mine in Bell County, Ky. But Sparks said inspectors still overheard a mine employee on another phone calling down to workers to shut the belts off because inspectors were outside.

"It's a problem because there's a lot of phones at a mine, like the guard shack and various mine offices," Sparks said. "You can get to different phones that you try to monitor, but before you get to the other ones, they can call in ahead of you."

Both of the Kentucky cases were part of a 57-mine inspection blitz launched in the days following the April 5 Upper Big Branch disaster. The agency has targeted mines with ventilation problems, high methane levels and buildup of coal dust — factors believed to have triggered the massive explosion at Upper Big Branch.

That theory was bolstered on Thursday when MSHA said a handheld meter found deep inside the Upper Big Branch detected explosive levels of methane before the blast. The meter detected 5 percent methane in the mine's atmosphere, according to Kevin Stricklin, MSHA's chief of coal mine safety.

Carol Raulston, a spokeswoman at the National Mining Association, said MSHA's response has

been overly aggressive considering that most mines have a safe track record.

"MSHA's high public profile on this inspection technique is offensive to the vast majority of U.S. mines that are trying their best to comply with all safety requirements and to improve miner safety," Raulston said.

"The conditions we're finding when we're able to circumvent some of these intended advance notices are just appalling," Main said.

In some cases, ventilation curtains had been removed, miners had not removed dangerous piles of rock dust or workers were mining in areas where they were not permitted, Main said.

Current law provides for up to a \$1,000 fine and imprisonment up to six months for anyone giving advance notice of an inspection. A mine safety bill working its way through the House would boost the prison term up to five years and raise the fine up to \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations that knowingly give advance notice to impede an investigation.

In the meantime, MSHA is working to "change the culture in the mining industry," Main said. "Showing up when we're least expected is a tool that's been used and will continue to be used."

Friday 27 August 2010

## **Chile: Family of trapped miner launches legal action**

*Extract from ABC Online, Aus*

The family of one of 33 miners trapped in a Chilean mine following a collapse early this month has announced it will sue the owners of the shaft and government inspectors.

The claim accuses them of negligently allowing the mine to be reopened in 2008 after being closed the previous year.

The lawyer representing the family, Remberto Valdes, says someone should be held responsible.

"I'm not thinking of monetary compensation. I'm thinking of holding people responsible," he said.

Carolina Narvaez, the wife of trapped miner Raul Bustos, says responsibility does not fall solely with the mine's owners, but also with people who did not check the safety of the mine.

Mr Valdes says the lawsuit targets the owners of the San Esteban Mining company in the northern town of San Jose, Alejandro Bohn and Marcelo Kemeny, as well as the governmental National Mining and Mines Service.

The mines service, also known as Sernageomin, was named because it authorised the re-opening of the mine after the place was closed in 2007 following an accident involving one of its workers.

Mr Valdes says the lawsuit is a criminal one.

It is the first legal action taken by the families of the miners, who became stuck 700 meters below the surface when the mine collapsed around them on August 5.

Meanwhile, a Chilean judge has ordered the mine to set aside \$US1.8 million for future compensation to the men, a court official told AFP.

The ruling by a local judge in Copiapo, close to where the San Jose mine is located, was in response to a petition from most of the families of the miners.

Located last Sunday (local time) alive and well in a shelter, preparations are being made to save the 33 men by digging an escape shaft to them - a process that could take four months to complete.

Chile's congress has opened an investigation into the accident, while president Sebastian Pinera has vowed to punish anybody found responsible under criminal and civil law.

Mr Pinera, who only took office in March, has taken a high-profile role in overseeing rescue operations.

His involvement deepened after an intercom conversation with the leader of the trapped miners, Luis Urzua.



Saviour: The drill which will dig the escape tunnel for the miners arrives at the mine site (Reuters: Ivan Alvarado)

"We are waiting for all of Chile to do everything to get us out of this hell," Mr Urzua told him.

"Mr President, we need you to be strong and to rescue us as soon as possible. Don't abandon us."

Mr Pinera vowed: "You won't be left alone, nor have you been alone a single moment."

The president later told reporters he was determined the men "will be with us for Christmas and New Year".

## Mining dictionary

### A guide to common mining terminology

#### W

#### winding engine/winder

Steam or electric machinery that hoists and lowers the cages in a mine shaft. Winders often have two drums around which the cable is wound, one letting out cable while the other takes it in, thus raising and lowering cages at the same time in adjacent compartments of the shaft.



Winder, Kidd Creek Mine, Canada

-Ed