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Saturday 18 September 2010

Africa: Trapped Chilean miners celebrate national day with meat pies feast

Extract from Telegraph.co.uk

The trapped Chilean miners marked the country's 200th birthday on Saturday with a traditional feast as the highlight of their unconventional subterranean celebrations.

Empanada pies stuffed with beef, olives and onions were baked in tubular shape so they could be delivered through the boreholes than connect them to the outside world.

Slices of barbecued steak were also sent down to their refuge half a mile beneath the Atacama desert.

The men had to wash down their meal with soft drinks after doctors vetoed their request for Chilean wine to toast the bicentennial. But they still delivered a rousing rendition of the country's anthem, captured for the nation via video-link.

A flag signed by the 33 men – there is one Bolivian among them who has been given honorary Chilean status for the celebrations – was sent in the other direction and raised next to the tent camp where relatives are keeping vigil at the surface.

"These 33 miner-heroes, with their iron will, their spirit, their fight, their strength, are an example to all of us of what it means to be Chilean," said senior Interior Ministry official Cristian Barra said as the flag was hoisted.

The epic survival story and relentless focus on rescuing the men has become the source of great national pride. But that has been tempered by the realisation for many middle-class Chileans that some of their compatriots still live extremely dangerous and difficult lives.

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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For the miners, who have been trapped since a huge rock fall on August 5, the morale-boosting celebrations come a day after another major breakthrough in the rescue operation.

A drill forging the escape shaft reached the underground chambers where the men are stranded. But the process of widening the 12-inch hole that was opened up on Friday to a shaft 26 inches in diameter is expected to take until at least early November.

As a reminder of the hard work ahead, rescuers on Saturday also sent down fuel to power machinery the miners will use to move tons of falling rock as their escape tunnels are widened.

At the surface, in Camp Hope, relatives marked the country's 200 years of independence from Spain in muted fashion – emphasising that for them the real celebrations will occur when the miners are rescued.

"Celebrate is not the word I would use as I am not with my husband," said Mario Gomez' wife Lillian. "The real celebration will be when they are all rescued."

Claudio Yañez brother in law Serge added: "We are here with them, in a way the whole country is underground with them. The bicentennial must be celebrated now but also when the miners are rescued."

And Carlos Bugueño's brother Pedro added: "Celebrating the bicentennial is important for the country, but for us the moment to celebrate is the first week of November."

Sunday 19 September 2010

Seven Trapped in Bauxite Mine in North China

Extract from CRIENGLISH.COM

Seven miners were believed to be trapped underground a flooded bauxite mine in north China's Shanxi Province Sunday, local authorities said.

Above-ground staff received a call from underground workers saying flood water gushed

into a bauxite mine owned by at the Duoshi Mining Co. in Lin County of Lvliang City at 2:35 p.m., the Lin county information office said.

Earlier the office mistakenly said the flooding occurred at about 2 a.m. when the seven miners were working underground.

Rescue workers were restoring roads, power and telecommunications disrupted by torrential rains on Saturday and Sunday before pumping out water to reach the trapped miners.

One hydrological station in Lin County recorded as much as 185 mm of rainfall within two hours.

Quote of the week



"An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."

Sir Winston Churchill
(UK politician and statesman, 1874-1965)

Monday 20 September 2010

S.Africa: Miner dies in rock fall

Extract from News24.com, South Africa

Johannesburg - A man has died in an accident at AngloGold Ashanti's Kopanang mine in the North West, the mining company said on Monday.

"Jonase Serame Mosebo... sustained injuries during a fall of ground accident, essentially it was a rock fall," said spokesperson for AngloGold Ashanti Joanne Jones.

The incident took place on the Saturday evening shift.

Mosebo was rushed to hospital but died shortly after his arrival.

"Mr Mosebo was from Lesotho and leaves behind a wife and seven children."

Jones said AngloGold Ashanti extended its condolences to Mosebo's family, friends and his community in Lesotho.

Qld: Moura remembers mine disasters

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

Today is the 35th anniversary of the first in a series of mining disasters at a central Queensland coal town.

Thirteen people died in a mine explosion at Moura, south-east of Rockhampton, on September 20, 1975.

There were also fatal explosions in Moura in 1986 and 1994.

Banana Shire Deputy Mayor Maureen Clancy says the community has moved on to an extent, but anniversaries of the accidents bring back painful memories.

"The sobering mood is always there on these anniversaries and whether we celebrate the 35th anniversary of Kianga today, every one of them is a very, very sensitive moment when those dates come around each year," he said.

Bill Allison was one of the first people in the mine on the morning of the 1975 tragedy and said he noticed something wrong straight away.

"When I went underground I noticed like a haze which I though could have been smoke but it was only fire, because this was the main airway and I could smell sort of fire stink," he said.

"There had been a fire there only a few weeks before - the shaft there near the main fan - so I thought I could be just smelling that."

Three killed in Ukraine mine accident

Extract from Hurriyet Daily News

Three miners died from gas poisoning Sunday while carrying out maintenance work in a

disused coal mine in eastern Ukraine, the Emergency Ministry said.

The men, who were working on strengthening the mine's tunnels, "violated safety rules and were poisoned by a mixture of carbon and methane," the ministry said in a statement.

The accident occurred at 3:50 a.m. local time at the Anenska mine in the eastern Lugansk region, the ministry said.

Deadly accidents are frequent in the Ukrainian mines, most of which are located in the country's industrial eastern region. Many of the mines are underfunded and poorly equipped, while safety violations are rife.

USA: MSHA announces results of 5 months of impact inspections

Extract from PR Newswire

The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that, from April through August, the agency conducted "impact inspections" at 111 coal and metal/nonmetal mines throughout the country designated by the agency as having safety or health issues. During that time, enforcement personnel issued 2,660 violations, 45 percent of which were classified as significant and substantial. These targeted inspections are part of an aggressive enforcement strategy launched in the wake of the worst mining disaster in almost 40 years.

"We have learned a lot of hard lessons since the explosion at Upper Big Branch Mine more than five months ago," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "While a number of mine operators receiving impact inspections have taken positive steps to clean up their act, some have refused to take seriously their responsibility to protect their workers and change their ways. We can't be at every mine every day, but when we have reason to believe that a particular mine operator is putting miners' lives at risk, we will not sit back and wait for a disaster to happen."

Throughout the course of the impact inspections, MSHA enforcement personnel employed a number of tactics at some mines to catch operators off guard, including late afternoon or evening arrivals at the mine site, driving unmarked government vehicles, and seizing mine phones to thwart communication between mining personnel working on the surface and those working underground.

"We are striving to make our inspections more strategic, less predictable and more effective," said Main.

Inspectors issued nearly 200 withdrawal orders at mines resulting from unwarrantable failures to comply with the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, as well as eight Section 107(a) withdrawal orders due to imminent dangers. Some mine operations actually fared worse during follow-up inspections. For example, CAM Mining LLC's Mine No. 28 in Pike County, Ky., received 42 citations and orders, with a "significant and substantial" rate of nearly 31 percent during its April inspection. In a July inspection, the operator received 73 citations and orders, with an S&S rate of nearly 44 percent. Wilcoal Mining's Tri-State One Mine in Claiborne County, Tenn., received 33 citations and orders, with an S&S rate of nearly 65 percent in April. In its July inspection, the operator was cited for 38 citations and orders, with an S&S rate of nearly 65 percent. As a result of 11 orders issued by MSHA, the mine was shut down.

MSHA initiated the new impact inspection program as the agency continues to work to reform the broken "pattern of violations" program, which was intended to identify persistent violators of safety standards and subject those mines to an enhanced enforcement regime. MSHA formally announced its intention to rewrite the regulations that govern the program last spring after it became clear that the program is not meeting its intended purpose. The current impact inspections are designed, in part, to catch

problems that would otherwise be addressed by a functioning pattern of violations system.

Mine operations were selected for impact inspections based on specific criteria: poor compliance history, including high numbers of violations or closure orders; indications of operator tactics, such as advance notification of inspections that prevent inspectors from observing violations; frequent hazardous complaints or hotline calls; inadequate workplace examinations; a high number of accidents, injuries or illnesses; fatalities; and adverse conditions such as increased methane liberation, faulty roof conditions and inadequate ventilation.

"Clearly, there are still too many mine operators who have not learned the lessons of Upper Big Branch and continue to put miners' lives at risk," said Main. "They don't yet understand the value of safety in our nation's mines. That's got to change. Our mission is to protect miners, and protect them we must."

Editor's Note: A PDF chart of the mines that were inspected accompanied the news release.

<http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/MSHA/MSHA20101321.pdf>

Tuesday 21 September 2010

China: Mine leaders to send substitutes underground

Extract from EastDay.com

BEIJING - Managers for a coal mine in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region have excused themselves from going underground with miners, as the State's September regulation required, by promoting seven management assistants as substitutions.

To raise attention to mining safety, the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety ordered mine leaders to descend below ground and ascend to the surface again along with their miners, or to face fines of up to 80 percent of their annual income.

However, the regulation, which will take effect on Oct 7, apparently will render little impact on mine leaders' money or their personal security in the privately owned Hongshan Chaoyang Coalmining Company in Huanjiang county, Guangxi.

The company handpicked seven people to be promoted to "assistants to managers" and to accompany the miners in compliance with the regulation, Li Jian, one of the company's managers, told China Daily on Monday over the phone.

"No one can tell now if the assistants could or could not be counted as coal mine leaders. The regulation does not clearly state if such senior positions could meet the requirement," he said.

The regulation vaguely stipulates that "leaders of a coal mine" refer to "important people in charge, members of the leadership, and chief and deputy chief engineers of the coal mine."

The Guangxi Bureau of Coal Mine Safety Supervision refused China Daily's interview request on Monday

Chile could rescue miners by mid-October

Extract from AFP

Copiapo, Chile - Workers in Chile expect to be able to rescue 33 trapped miners by mid-October, rather than early November as originally anticipated, a news report said Tuesday.

The daily El Mercurio newspaper, citing unnamed government sources, reported that officials said state-of-the-art drilling equipment at the scene has made faster-than-expected progress in efforts to reach the men, who have been trapped underground since an August 5 mine collapse.

"There is a chance of completing the operation before President (Sebastian) Pinera departs for Europe on the 15th" of October, one official was quoted by the newspaper as saying.

Shortly after the mine collapse, Chilean authorities warned that it was unlikely that they would be able to free the men before Christmas, but later said a rescue could take place as early as November.

Speaking this past Sunday, Mining Minister Laurence Golborne said he would not officially change the rescue timeline, but nevertheless suggested it could happen more quickly than originally anticipated.

"We have always spoken of the first days of November, but the plans now are slightly ahead of schedule," he said.

"We are gaining a day here and a day there, but we do not claim victory or generate unrealistic expectations, since we are talking about an inexact science," Golborne said, noting the complexities and safety concerns of drilling through layers of granite rock.

The rescue effort involves digging down more than 600 meters (about 2,000 feet) to get to the miners trapped since a cave-in August 5.

The men — 32 Chileans and one Bolivian — have survived underground longer than anyone on record.

They are being supplied with food, water, medicine and entertainment through three supply holes, which also carry communication lines to the surface, where family members have been camped at the entrance

This week in mining accident history

20 September 1975

Kianga No.1 Mine

Moura, Queensland, Australia

Underground coal mine

13 killed, spontaneous combustion explosion

Source: www.dme.qld.gov.au

During the past forty years there have been three mining disasters in the Moura district at a cost of 36 lives.

The first occurred at Kianga Mine on 20 September 1975. Thirteen miners died from an explosion which was found to have been initiated by spontaneous combustion. The mine was sealed and the bodies of the men were never recovered.

Summary

At about 5.10pm on September 20, 1975, an explosion occurred in the underground workings of the Kianga No. 1 mine in central Queensland. Thirteen men who were underground at the time attempting to seal off a heating in the 4 North Section were killed.

As a result of the fatalities an inquiry was held in Rockhampton, conducted by the mining warden with assistance from four persons having practical mining knowledge. The inquiry commenced on November 10, 1975, and closed on November 24, 1975.

During the inquiry evidence showed the mine to be worked by a bord and pillar system. The seam being worked was not extracted to the full height and the coal was liable to spontaneous combustion. Methane had also been found in the workings.

The inquiry found that an explosion was initiated by a spontaneous combustion source which ignited inflammable gas and was propagated involving coal dust. The explosion flame front did not reach the surface.

It was recommended by the inquiry that:—

(a) the knowledge of all member of the coal mining industry in Queensland be upgraded with regard to spontaneous combustion.

(b) changes be made in the Queensland Coal Mining Act to provide for:

- additional protection against the propagation of coal dust explosions,
- monitoring or sampling of ventilation,
- preparatory seals and the recognition and delineation of responsibilities of persons with technical authority superior to a manager.

(c) additional analytical facilities to be provided for the industry.

Other general recommendations relating to safety were also made.

Full report warden's inquiry at

http://www.dme.qld.gov.au/zone_files/inspectorate_pdf/kianga.pdf

Wednesday 22 September 2010

USA: Symposium off to intense start

Extract from Bluefield Daily Telegraph, W.Va, USA

BLUEFIELD — The road to zero fatalities was paved with moments of intensity Tuesday as the federal government's top coal regulator, coal industry experts and some angry coal miners shared their feelings during the first day of sessions in the two-day Bluefield Coal Symposium, sponsored by the Greater Bluefield Chamber of Commerce.

Joseph Main, assistant secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health of the Mine Safety and Health Administration started his post-luncheon keynote address by sharing his reasons for accepting the position of head of MSHA, but then shared images he observed on April 5 at the Upper Big Branch South Mine disaster less than six months after President Barack Obama appointed him to the position.

"We owe them more than prayers," Main said as he shared Obama's remarks following the disaster at the Raleigh County mine, "We owe them action." He cited several of the actions he took to interview coal miners and conduct inspections. He said that during the course of the next several weeks, MSHA learned a great deal about how operators can alert working personnel that federal inspectors are on a mine site. "MSHA should not have to resort to these tactics to protect coal miners," he said.

Through most of his presentation, Main discussed how MSHA searches for patterns of violations and said that the agency will continue

along the same path., “until mine operators take real ownership of safety at the mines.”

A group of 15-20 coal miners tried to speak with Main as he left, but they said he didn't have time for them. “He said he is on a tight schedule, but he has 10 minutes to talk with reporters, but not a minute to talk with us,” Shawn Turley said. The coal miners from Elk Run and Marfork Coal all wanted to talk with Main, but asked the press to speak with Turley.

“We're concerned that MSHA made us shut the dust scrubbers off our continuous miners,” Turley said. “They shut them off and want us to control dust by only taking 20-foot cuts at a time, but even taking a smaller cut doesn't stop the dust.

“You almost feel like a guinea pig,” Turley said. “Without dust controls on these continuous miners, all the coal miners are breathing in dust the whole shift. Those scrubbers took away that problem. It just don't make sense.

“The scrubber is the best tool that ever came along,” Buddy Mayor said. “I've already put in 32 years, but these younger guys are breathing dust all the time and they're going to suffer black lung. Yet, he ain't got a couple minutes to talk with us.”

Virlo Stiltner, 21, a senior in the mining engineering program at Virginia Tech from Grundy, Va., said he understood Main's point, up to a certain point, but he said he feels the coal industry has been making progress to address safety issues. “It's like we're having to start all over again.”

During his presentation later in the afternoon, John Feddock, senior vice president of Marshall Miller & Associates Inc., said that the coal industry has been working to resolve its safety issues, but instead of working together to resolve problems, “MSHA's been finding fault with us,” Feddock said.

“All accidents are caused,” Haven King, founder of Hazard, Ky., based Coal Mine Our Future said as the kick-off speaker at the conference.

“Because all accidents are caused, we can do something to prevent them. Our future is coal.”

Most of King's presentation didn't address the concept of arriving at the goal of achieving zero accidents in the coal mining industry. Instead, he spoke with evangelical zeal about the pressure the coal industry is now facing from aggressive enforcement of the Clean Water Act by Lisa Jackson, head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

“She is going to take your jobs because of conductivity,” King, Perry County, Ky., clerk said, to an audience that appeared intent on drinking in all the details of the symposium. “Mountaintop removal coal mining in Kentucky is just about non-existent now.”

The presenters who followed King, were filled the room with data that seemed to captivate the attention of college mining engineering students from West Virginia University and Virginia Tech. Both universities were well-represented at the symposium.

“There is always change in the coal industry,” Eric Howe, 21, from Moundsville said. Howe is a senior mining engineering student at WVU. He has worked for Consol Energy through his college career, and cited statistics he had just heard in presentations by Jeff Welsh, associate director for Science, Office of Mine Safety and Health Research, as well as Larry Grayson, of Penn State University and chair of the Mine Safety Technology & Training Commission, to illustrate the point that the coal mining industry learns from its experiences, and has made dramatic improvements in non-fatal lost time injuries in the past decade.

“Some of my friends don't like what I do, but I love helping them understand the coal industry better,” he said. “My roommate had some friends over and they wanted to start an argument with me, but I don't mind explaining the importance of coal to them at all.”

“We have made good progress in reducing coal mine fatalities,” Welsh said at the conclusion of

his thorough presentation. "But certainly, in terms of disasters (more needs to be accomplished. There are some challenges."

Grayson said that coal mining fatalities can be prevented, and said that creating a culture of prevention can help the industry achieve that goal. He pointed out that as many as 85 percent of coal mines have not had a lost time accident in the past decade, however, he noted that mine disasters this decade including the Jim Walters No. 5 Mine explosions that claimed 13 lives in 2001, Sago, Aracoma and Kentucky Darby mine disasters in 2006 that claimed 12, 2 and 5 lives respectively, the Crandal Canyon Mine disaster that claimed 9 lives and Gibson County disaster that claimed 3 lives as well as the April 5 disaster at the Upper Big Branch South Mine that claimed 29 lives has made it imperative for the coal industry to adopt a "culture of prevention."

He said that in spite of the successful mine operators who have excellent safety records, the coal industry will face even greater scrutiny "until we address the major hazardous events," he said.

Dr. Mary McMasters of the Comprehensive Behavioral Health and Frank Linkous, director of the Virginia Division of Mines, Minerals and Energy, provided a sobering one-two presentation on the frightening realities of drug abuse and addiction. "In my opinion, it's a national security issue as well," McMasters said. Linkous made an emotional presentation. "We are a tight, close community," Linkous said of state coal regulators. "We share our license suspension information with Kentucky and West Virginia."

Other day one presenters included Joe Zimmerman of Joy Mining Machinery, Randall J. Harris of the West Virginia Mine Safety Technology Task Force, Jeffrey H. Kravits, chief scientific development MSHA Technical Support, John Heard, the Virginia Coal Association and Rodney S. Lucas of Caterpillar

Inc. Bill Reid serves as chair of the symposium that will resume at 8 a.m., this morning.

USA: Massey chief accuses feds of lying in W.Va. probe

Extract from Associated Press

BLUEFIELD, W.Va. — The embattled chief executive of Massey Energy accused federal regulators Tuesday of not making a genuine effort to investigate the explosion that killed 29 miners and injured two at the company's Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia.

Instead, the Mine Safety and Health Administration is lying to the public in hopes of winning a publicity battle, Don Blankenship told an industry conference.

"Today what you have is MSHAgate. You've got a situation where they won't tell the truth about what they know," he said. "We're not making a genuine effort at the government level to find out what happened.

He said more must be done to prevent explosions, but with the realization that not every blast is avoidable.

An MSHA spokeswoman did not immediately respond to an e-mail requesting comment Tuesday evening.

The agency is heading the civil investigation into the April 5 explosion, the worst U.S. coal mining disaster in 40 years. The U.S. Department of Justice is overseeing a separate criminal investigation.

Earlier in the day, MSHA announced an emergency rule to require underground mines to do more to control explosive coal dust following the deadliest U.S. coal mine explosion in 40 years. It's first major federal regulatory change since the disaster.

The change comes after growing evidence that coal dust played a role in the blast explosion.

The change will increase the amount of pulverized stone or other inert material that

mines must use to dilute coal dust in tunnels that bring fresh air underground.

The change is based on federal research that shows decreasing the amount of coal dust in air intakes can help prevent explosions, Main said.

Mines must comply by Oct. 7 in new areas and by Nov. 22 in existing tunnels, Main said.

The coal industry expressed immediate support for the change, which is already a state requirement in West Virginia.

"West Virginia producers are complying," said Luke Popovich, a spokesman for the National Mining Association. "Many have carried it to their operations outside West Virginia."

MSHA announced Friday that more than 1,400 of 1,803 samples collected inside the Upper Big Branch mine by investigators show excessive amounts of coal dust were present before the blast. The findings bolster MSHA's preliminary findings issued 10 days after the explosion that a mix of methane and coal dust caused the explosion.

The Associated Press reported Sept. 12 that handwritten logs recording inspections by Upper Big Branch employees showed eight conveyor belts had excessive amounts of coal dust 32 minutes before the explosion. Mine owner Massey Energy's chief counsel, Shane Harvey, has conceded that miners would have been unable to correct that violation before the blast. But Harvey insists that the mine was adequately dusted and the logs merely reflect reminders to dust the mine.

He repeated Massey's contention that dust samples collected months after the accident are baseless.

Harvey raised no immediate objection to the emergency rule.

"We'll analyze the regulation," Harvey said. "We agree that rock dusting is critically important in coal mines."

Blankenship cited several examples of what he considers lies and misinformation from the agency. Among them were MSHA's decision to order two Massey employees out of the mine the day of the blast. MSHA has not publicly accused the pair of tampering with evidence as Blankenship claimed.

"It raises an issue about how much sense they have to think that someone would do that," Blankenship said.

He also blasted MSHA over claims that methane monitors at the mine had been tampered with to prevent them from working. Those accusations have come from current and former employees during congressional testimony.

Blankenship also repeated Massey's contention that methane entered the mine from a floor crack and overwhelmed safeguards such as ventilation equipment. MSHA has dismissed that notion.

Several of the victims apparently tried to cut off power to the mine's main mining machine in the seconds before the blast, Blankenship said.

USA: Massey managers sue to block disaster interviews

Extract from the Charleston Gazette

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Six Massey Energy management personnel -- including the company's corporate safety director -- have filed suit challenging subpoenas that would force them to answer questions about the April 5 explosion that killed 29 workers at Massey's Upper Big Branch Mine.

Lawyers for Massey vice president of safety Elizabeth Chamberlin and five other mine managers allege the state Office of Miners Health, Safety and Training is wrongly using its subpoena power to help federal Mine Safety and Health Administration officials force them to appear for interviews with investigators.

"It is apparent that MSHA has inveigled OMHST to serve as MSHA's stalking horse in this matter, a role the state of West Virginia neither has nor

could assign to the state agency," the lawyers wrote in papers filed in Raleigh County Circuit Court.

The court filing sets up another legal battle between Massey and government investigators over the ongoing probe of the worst U.S. coal-mining disaster in 40 years.

"It is unprecedented in the history of mining accidents in this country for a substantial group of mine management to refuse to provide information which will help to prevent this kind of accident from occurring in the future," said longtime mine safety advocate Davitt McAteer, who is conducting an independent probe of the disaster for Gov. Joe Manchin.

In their court filing, the Massey officials object specifically to MSHA investigators taking part in any witness interviews conducted under the authority of state mine safety office subpoenas.

Under state law, West Virginia regulators can compel witnesses to appear for questioning about mining accidents regardless of whether interviews are conducted in public or private. But federal law gives MSHA authority to subpoena witnesses only if the agency investigates through a public hearing, something the Obama administration has refused to do.

MSHA is leading the civil investigation of the explosion, and the disaster is also the subject of a separate federal criminal investigation.

The Massey officials' court filing repeats the company's allegations that MSHA is conducting an unfair and dishonest investigation, rushing to conclusions and attempting to shift blame from any agency role in the disaster.

"MSHA has made relentless and entirely self-serving efforts to impugn Massey Energy and [subsidiary] Performance Coal ever since the accident itself," the court filing said. "At a time of great tragedy and confusion, MSHA immediately sought very publicly to assign blame and to distance itself from its own responsibility for the conditions that may have caused or contributed to the disaster."

MSHA officials have not responded to requests for comment about Massey managers fighting the state's subpoenas, but federal officials issued a news release Wednesday to tout a federal administrative law judge's decision to reject Massey's challenge to MSHA investigation procedures.

"Massey's complaints about the investigation were unfounded, and the company was not disadvantaged in any way," said MSHA chief Joe Main.

Also Wednesday, The Associated Press reported that Massey CEO Don Blankenship had revealed what Blankenship said was evidence that several Upper Big Branch victims knew before their deaths that explosive methane was pouring into the mine just moments before the explosion. Blankenship said there's evidence that miners cut off electricity to the cutting head of the mine's main mining machine and stopped its conveyor belt.

In early August, state mine safety director Ron Wooten had revealed that the mine's longwall mining machine was turned off about 98 seconds before the explosion was believed to have occurred.

And during a media briefing on Aug. 11, MSHA officials confirmed that information, and said that further investigation was needed to determine exactly what it meant.

"The machine was not mining coal when this occurred," said Kevin Stricklin, MSHA's coal administrator. "We're not sure if someone hit an emergency stop button or if the person who had remote control ... if you walk so far away, it also shuts down."

In the AP story, Blankenship also revealed that there was what regulators call a "methane outburst" from the Upper Big Branch Mine floor in 1997, prior to previously reported outbursts in 2003 and 2004.

Investigators are examining whether a methane outburst played a role in the April disaster. Neither Massey nor MSHA has explained

publicly what -- if anything -- was done after the earlier incidents to prevent a recurrence.

Thursday 23 September 2010

Chilean hospital prepares for the arrival of 33 trapped miners

Extract from CNN

Copiapo, Chile (CNN) -- Military choppers are on standby to swoop into the heliport. Motorcycle police are on alert to escort a fleet of ambulances. And a throng of electric beds with crisp white sheets stand vacant and ready.

This is part of the contingency plan to rush 33 trapped miners from the spot where many hope they will be pulled out of the earth to a hospital in Copiapo, the nearest town to the collapsed San Jose gold and copper mine.

"We've been ready since Day One of this disaster," said Hernan Rojas, director of Copiapo Regional Hospital. "We expected injured miners to start coming in soon after the collapse, but this has dragged out."

Government rescue coordinator Andre Sougarret said by the end of this week, he will commission the construction of three cage-like capsules that will haul the miners back to the surface.

The government forecasts a rescue in early November. However, speculation is growing that a rescue could come much sooner, as three drills work around the clock to punch a man-size shaft through half a mile of rock into the cavern where the 33 men have been holed up since the August 5 cave-in.

President Sebastian Pinera, during a visit to the mine Sunday, fueled anticipation when he told media, "We don't know when, but it will be much sooner than you expect."

At the publicly funded Copiapo Regional Hospital, Rojas is fine-tuning his emergency response teams.

"We will be ready from the moment they extract the miners," he said. "They will come out one-

by-one, and we will get communication that the miners are on their way. At that stage, we activate our internal plan."

As he strolled around a recently completed "special care unit," Rojas described how the freed miners would first be examined at a field hospital set up at the mine.

"There's going to be a field hospital. I don't know exactly what functions it will have, but there will be triage system to identify the most complex cases," he said.

Once triage is complete, the plan calls for flying the men aboard military helicopters to a heliport at the Chilean Army's 23rd Infantry Regiment based in Copiapo. That flight could take 15 or 20 minutes.

The heliport is about 300 meters from the hospital. The journey through the streets is about 800 meters.

Rojas said police would seal the streets, and motorcycles would escort ambulances to the emergency department of the hospital.

"The alarm will be raised. The hospital goes on alert, and the patients will be brought in via the emergencies department, which is open 24 hours," Rojas said.

The hospital director said some of the miners might not need special monitoring. Such miners would be accommodated in wards on the second and fourth floors. But there is space for up to 10 of the men to be interned in the newly inaugurated special care unit -- a unit intended for closely monitoring patients except those with life-threatening conditions.

"Don't look at this as a bed -- consider it a patient unit," Rojas said proudly as he showed CNN around the special care unit Wednesday. Green lights blinked on a series of buttons on the foot of the bed, and instructions for lowering and raising appeared in three languages on the bed frame.

If any of the miners' lives appear to be in danger, they will be taken directly to the intensive care

unit once extracted, Rojas said. So far there's no indication that will be necessary, but Rojas said his team is prepared with traumatologists, brain surgeons and ophthalmologists.

"People ask, 'They've been so long underground, could their eyesight be damaged?' I don't know the answer right now," Rojas said.

He said the core team in the 10-bed special care unit would consist of a staff nurse and three paramedics per shift plus a doctor making rounds. Specialists would visit the miners in that unit on an as-needed basis.

If any of the miners refuse hospital treatment in favor of simply trying to head home with their loved ones, they will be dissuaded, Rojas said.

"That will be the basic task of the frontline medical team up at the mine. The people from mental health and the psychologists will have to use their charm on the miners to persuade them to get checked over before they discharge them," Rojas said.

The special care unit at Copiapo Regional Hospital still smells of fresh green paint. White sheets are covered with rolls of clear plastic to stop dust settling. Heart monitors are off, and suction pumps and oxygen lines remain silent.

This ward has never been used before. It was completed two months before the San Jose mine caved in.

With their hospital located in the heart of one of Chile's major mining regions, staff members at the Copiapo facility have treated miners from accidents before. But none of the accidents have attracted this level of worldwide attention.

"We're used to treating the local people and not making much noise or fuss about it. But this is different," Rojas said.

As he showed off pristine white forms to record the miners' vital signs and other medical notes, Rojas fidgeted in his suit pockets.

"The only thing I'm still missing is the pen," he said.

And, of course, 33 would-be patients who remain trapped half a mile underground.

Burundi: Six illegal tin miners die in collapse

Extract from BBC News Africa

At least six people have died after a cassiterite mine collapsed in Burundi, 120km (75 miles) north of the capital.

Three other people injured in the accident have been taken to hospital, and another four are missing.



The authorities in Kayanza province, where the accident happened, told the BBC the group were digging illegally.

A BBC reporter says despite Burundi's mineral wealth there are few official mines and even they use crude methods of extraction and safety is poor.

Most of the small mines found in the west and north of Burundi are exploited by villagers using hoes and ploughs.

Burundi is one of the world's poorest nations and is emerging from a brutal 12-year civil war which shattered its economy.

Mobile phone mineral

The BBC's Prime Ndikumagenge in the capital, Bujumbura, says mining accidents are common at this time of year, when the first rains arrive.

Cassiterite is the main ingredient for tin.

The mine fields in the northern province of Kayanza are also rich in colombo-tantalite ore, or coltan, used to make mobile phones.

Victor Ntakirutimana, the administrator of Kabarore district in Kayanza where Wednesday's collapse occurred, told the BBC many villagers do not mind risking their lives to get even a small amount of the mineral as it is so valuable.

Residents also say it is the miners' belief that when a big number of people perish inside a mine it is a sign that the mine is rich - so survivors continue to dig it even more eagerly, our correspondent reports.

Friday 24 September 2010

USA: Feds cite 3 Montana mines for dozens of safety violations as part of nationwide crackdown

Extract from San Francisco Examiner

BILLINGS, MONT. — Three Montana mines have been hit with dozens of safety citations in recent months as federal officials step up enforcement against mines with repeat violations.

The effort is part of a nationwide crackdown on troubled mines that began after West Virginia's Upper Big Branch Mine disaster killed 29 miners in April.

In a series of inspections meant to curb unsafe practices, officials cited the Stillwater platinum mine near Nye for 11 violations; Signal Peak's Bull Mountain coal mine near Roundup for 44 violations; and Revett Mineral's Troy silver mine for 24 violations.

The citations detailed 21 problems that inspectors said could cause serious injury or illness, including one at Stillwater, 10 at Bull Mountain and 10 at Troy.

The mines had drawn scrutiny because of past problems, Mine Health and Safety Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere said.

"If a company is complying with the regulations they have nothing to worry about. It's the ones

that ignore good safety and health practices," she said.

Fines and penalties have not yet been assessed for most violations.

Major problems reported during the inspections included pools of standing water that could lead to electrocutions, smoking or open flames near flammable gases or liquids, and failure to correct hazardous conditions.

All three mines have been the scene of injuries due to accidents. There has been one fatality at the Bull Mountain mine, where in January a truck being repaired lurched off its jack stands and crushed a mechanic.

Two citations were issued following that fatality.

When Signal Peak opened Bull Mountain in 2008, it became the only operational underground coal mine in the state.

Company president and chief executive John DeMichei said mine managers were working closely with federal regulators to improve safety practices. In addition, the company was focused on hiring more experienced foremen to help train its many younger miners.

"I have not been happy with our accident experience or violation experience, and it's part of the learning curve we're going through," said DeMichei, who served two decades with the Mine Health and Safety Administration, including stints as a mine engineer and inspector.

Requests for comment from operators of the Troy and Stillwater mines were not immediately returned.

Montana Mining Association executive director Debbie Shea said the safety crackdown was a "knee-jerk reaction" to the disaster in West Virginia and found fault with mines that work hard on safety.

"I know they are really being aggressive with this, but the mines that I've seen, they are wanting to do the right thing," she said.

"Everybody wants to keep their mines safe and healthy."

A Montana mining official welcomed the federal enforcement effort.

"It's a good thing for safety; it's a bad thing for the mines," said Ron Umscheid of the mining section at the Montana Department of Labor. "They're going to have to do a closer examination of their work areas and their safety procedures, and that might also mean more training."

Umscheid said his agency is prohibited under a 1998 law from conducting safety inspections of metal mines.

USA: Inadequate safety policies blamed in miner's death

Extract from the Salt Lake Tribune, USA

A federal investigation has determined inadequate company safety procedures were to blame for a rock fall that killed a 28-year-old Moab miner in May near La Sal, San Juan County.



Services will be held at noon Saturday at River of Life Christian Church in Moab for Hunter Diehl, 28. The Moab man died May 26 in a rock fall at the Pandora uranium mine outside of La Sal, San Juan County. Photo courtesy of Diehl family

Hunter Diehl died at the Pandora Complex uranium mine May 26, shortly after a co-worker found he had been hit in the back by a chunk of rock 15 feet wide and 11 feet long, ranging in thickness from 4 to 30 inches. The rock collapsed from the wall of an underground tunnel where Diehl was working alone, using a 92-inch long crowbar to pry loose small chunks

of rock shattered by explosives work the previous day.

A federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) report released Thursday said Diehl's employer, Moab-based Reliance Resources Inc., did not have adequate written policies and procedures requiring experienced personnel to inspect an area before mining begins and requiring that miners "scale" loose materials — the industry term for the work Diehl was doing — from a safe location.

Reliance Resources operated the mine under contract for its owner, Denison Mines (USA) Corp., a Canadian company with offices in Denver.

The report said citations for those infractions were issued June 30, then terminated July 14 when Reliance Resources amended its policies to clarify those points. The company also provided employees with additional training in examining loose ground and proper manual scaling methods.

MSHA's online data system showed the citations were two of five issued June 30 as part of its probe, including one for failing to notify the agency within 15 minutes of a fatal or serious-injury accident.

While the agency's website said the fine for that violation has not yet been assessed, it showed that Denison Mines also had paid a \$5,000 fine for not reporting the fatal accident in a timely manner. The report noted that MSHA learned of the 6:35 a.m. accident through the news media, first establishing contact with the company at 11:10 a.m.

Ruth Ann Watterson, Reliance Resources' compliance officer, said the company is reviewing MSHA's enforcement action and intends to "contest inaccuracies in the allegations. Reliance Resources is a small operator with a very close-knit, committed work force. The loss of one of those employees is felt deeply by the company and its employees. Our

continued goal is prevention of accidents," she added.

Mine workers targeted in drug operation

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

A police operation targeting fly-in fly-out mine workers has resulted in the seizure of a quantity of drugs.

Police, with the assistance of Customs and the Australian Federal Police, targeted more than 2,500 mine workers and their luggage for illicit drugs and explosives over four days this month.

Drug and explosive detection dogs were also used to search the workers at airports in Perth, Darwin, Alice Springs and Adelaide.

Detective Senior Constable John Garden says officers were alarmed to find cannabis and the drug 'ice' among the three batches of drugs on workers flying back from mine sites.

"You can't say the results were good, we did come across some drugs and unfortunately the drugs were coming off-site," he said.

"The quantities weren't that large but I guess the concern there is what was the quantity going the other way."

Police are also using forensic technology to find the owner of a parcel of drugs left unattended on one flight.

One man has been charged with possession of cannabis.

Police say they expect to lay more charges over coming weeks.

Saturday 25 September 2010

Court freezes assets of Chilean mine company

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

A court in Chile has frozen the assets of the company which owns the mine where 33 men have been trapped for 50 days.

The move was requested by the Chilean government, which wants the company to repay the cost of the miners' rescue.

The San Esteban mining company was in financial trouble even before the main access tunnel to its copper and gold mine collapsed.

The rescue operation, which is expected to take several more weeks, will add millions of dollars to its debts.

Sunday 26 September 2010

Chilean miners start training for rescue

Extract from Washington Post

SANTIAGO, CHILE - After nearly two months trapped in a collapsed copper mine, 33 miners begin training Monday for the final chapter of their underground odyssey: escape.

As three simultaneous rescue operations slowly drill through 2,250 feet of solid rock, the men are receiving detailed instructions on the latest plans to haul them out one by one next month inside a torpedo-shaped rescue capsule dubbed "The Phoenix."

The underground drama has commanded worldwide interest. A series of minor failures with drilling equipment and the challenge of carving out the nearly half-mile-long rescue tunnel have made the entire rescue operation uncertain.

If the current three rescue operations fail, a Plan D calls for the men to climb ladders for hundreds of feet, a physical feat so daunting that a personal trainer has been hired to coach the miners.

Jean Christophe Romagnoli, an adviser to both the Chilean Armed Forces and professional athletes, has spent the past two weeks teaching the men light calisthenics in preparation for more strenuous phys-ed classes which begin Monday. "They have a two-kilometer stretch of tunnels, the men are walking the tunnels and some of them are jogging as a group. We are using the

U.S. Army fitness training as a model, so the men sing while they jog."

Romagnoli said the singing was a safety precaution to make sure the men kept their heartbeat between 120 and 140 beats per minute. "We know that if their heart rate goes above 140, they can't sing and jog at the same time."

Despite numerous challenges to training the men via video conference from above, Romagnoli said the men were enthusiastic about the new routines. "One of the advantages we have is these guys are strong, they are accustomed to working their arms and upper body. This is not a sedentary population we are dealing with, they will respond quickly." While rescue procedures call for the men to spend just 20 minutes inside the rescue cage, Romagnoli is preparing the men to stand immobile for up to an hour. "Ideally we leave them with a ample margin of error," he said.

Over the weekend, Chilean Navy engineers delivered the first of three rescue capsules to the mine to start testing the custom-built cage-like structure. "The Phoenix" - painted with the colors of the Chilean flag - weighs just under 1,012 pounds and is equipped with WiFi communications and three oxygen tanks that allow the men to breathe for up to 90 minutes.

The capsule also sports two emergency exits for use if the tube becomes wedged in the rescue shaft. In a worst-case scenario, the miner will be able to open the floor of the capsule and lower himself back into the depths of the mine.

Once the rescue tunnel is complete, two people - "a miner and a paramedic with rescue training" - will first be lowered into the hole, said Jaime Manalich, the Chilean Health Minister, as he outlined what he described as a 500-person rescue operation.

Once lowered into the hole, the paramedic will administer medications and intravenous hydration to the men. Sedatives will be used if

necessary to calm the men before the ride to the surface.

Using health charts and interviews, the rescue coordinators are classifying the miners into three groups: the able, the weak and the strong. The miners will be evacuated in that order, allowing the first group to serve as a test case for the more critical second group. The fittest men will be taken at the end of the operation, which is expected to last nearly two full days.

Manalich said the rescued men will be immediately taken to a field hospital - currently under construction - for triage. There the men will be stabilized, then either kept on site for observation or flown by helicopter to a nearby military base or hospital.

After protests from family members, the government ceded to demands for immediate contact with the rescued men. A maximum of two members per family will be allowed to visit briefly as soon as each man is pulled to safety.

"We always had hope that they would be alive and now to see the capsule is exciting," said Carolina Lobos, 26, daughter of Franklin Lobos, a former football star now trapped underground.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

Z

zinc-box

A box within which cyanide-treated gold is precipitated with shavings of metallic zinc.

-Ed



Industry & Investment

The 20th Electrical Engineering Safety Seminar

will be held at Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 10 November and Thursday 11 November 2010.

http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/354538/EESS-2010-rego-brochure.pdf