



Mining Accident News No.1035

26 November to 3 December 2010

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Friday 26 November 2010

USA: Judge upholds W.Va. mine accident reporting rule

Extract from Bloomberg Businessweek

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Kanawha County Circuit Court judge has upheld a West Virginia law giving coal mine operators 15 minutes to tell regulators about fires and other serious accidents.

Judge Tod Kaufman's ruling comes in a case involving International Coal Group Inc. subsidiary Wolf Run Mining.

The state Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training fined Wolf Run \$100,000 for reporting a 2008 gas ignition at its Sentinel Mine well past the deadline. Kaufman's Nov. 19 ruling reinstated the penalty, which had been overturned by the state Coal Mine Safety Board of Appeals.

The reporting requirement was one of a myriad of changes in state law passed after an explosion that killed 12 miners at ICG's Sago Mine on Jan. 2, 2006.

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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ICG lawyer Roger Nicholson says the company is disappointed and may appeal.

Zambia: Union calls for safety of miners

Extract from lusakatimes.com

National Union of Miners and Allied Workers (NUMAW) president Mundiya Sikufele has urged mining companies in the country to prioritize safety in their operations to avoid loss of lives.

Mr Sikufele says mining is a dangerous venture hence the need for the companies to prioritize the safety of their workers by adhering to safety measures and regulations.



File picture: Collum Coal Mine workers

He said this in Solwezi during the funeral service of a First Quantum Minerals (FQM) dumper truck operator Thomas Nsonoka held at Trinity United Church of Zambia congregation.

Nsonoka died on the spot in a mine accident after the dumper track he was operating fell into a deep open pit at the weekend.

"In as much as we appreciate the mining investment in the country, the safety of the workers is a number one priority," he said.

Mr Sikufele further called upon the two mining companies operating in Solwezi district, Kansanshi and Lumwana to construct a hospital in the area that can handle disastrous cases resulting from mine accidents.

Speaking at the same funeral service FQM representative, Abaleka Mwandila said the company has learnt the death of Mr Nsonoka

with deep sorrow as it has lost a very diligent worker.

Mr Mwandila said the deceased was one person who was committed to work and that his death is a very big blow to the company.

Condolence book for New Zealand mine victims

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Uniting Church in Wollongong has set up a condolence book to allow Illawarra residents to express their sympathies over the Pike River mine disaster in New Zealand.

29 men died in gas explosions at the South island pit while teams of rescuers, including 11 people from the Illawarra, were waiting for gas levels to abate to allow them to go underground to help.

The Uniting Church's reverend Gordon Bradbery says many people have been moved by the tragedy.

"We cant do much about bringing people back to life, but we can stand by people who are going through such an incredibly painful time," he said.

The condolence book will be forwarded to the mayor of Greymouth next week.

As New Zealand authorities begin the search for answers, the head of Mines Rescue NSW says southern districts miners have extensive experience in dealing with methane in coal seams.

Paul Healey has supported the decision NOT to send in rescue teams in New Zealand while gas levels were unpredictable and dangerous.

He says safety is a priority in underground operations and in NSW pits, there is non stop methane monitoring.

"Most of the machines have automatic continuous methane monitoring installed so it's something that happens 24/7," he said.

"In addition, there are a range of additional personal safety checks but methane levels are continuously checked at cutting operations."

The Southern districts has been the scene of several major coal mine explosions - The Mt Kembla mine disaster in 1902 in which 96 men died, an explosion at Bulli colliery in the 1880s which killed 81 miners and the most recent when 14 men died at Appin colliery in 1979.

Recovery equipment heading to mine disaster site

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Specialist equipment and teams from Australia will arrive in New Zealand today in the hope they can make the Pike River coal mine safe enough for the bodies of the 29 miners to be recovered.

The miners, who had been trapped underground for more than five days, were declared dead on Wednesday afternoon after a second massive explosion tore through the underground tunnels.

New Zealand has been in mourning, with flags flying at half mast on Thursday as the country comes to terms with the scale of the disaster.

The machinery being sent to Greymouth has been used in the past to put out coal mine fires in Australia and the United States.

The Queensland mines rescue service is bringing a team of 16 people to help with the recovery.

It is bringing equipment that will put out any fires inside the mine and dispel the explosive gases.

The machine, called a gag unit, is a jet engine with an afterburner, into which water is injected to produce an oxygen-free, inert gas with a high content of water vapour.

UPDATE: The "GAG unit" arrived in Hokitika from Australia around 6.30am today (26 Nov).

The engine is already at the mine site, but would take up to three days to set up, NSW state manager of CS Mines Rescue, Seamus Devlin said.

The Gorniczy Agregat Gasniczy (GAG) engine emits carbon dioxide, nitrogen and water vapour, starving

the mine of oxygen and preventing combustion, he said. Once fires were extinct, rescuers could use breathing gear to enter, or fresh air could be allowed back in.

The GAG was "tried and tested", having been used successfully in both in Australia and in the United States to extinguish a fire at West Virginia's Loveridge Mine, allowing workers to re-enter it in 2003, Devlin said.

It is hoped this unit will make the mine safe enough to retrieve the bodies of the 29 men.

But New Zealand prime minister John Key has warned it could take months to recover the miners' bodies.

Yesterday Mr Key said previous international experience had shown the operation could take "quite some months".

"That [recovery] has to occur in a way that is safe to those that would undertake that mission," he said.

Families and local mayor Tony Kookshorn are calling for the bodies to be retrieved as soon as possible.

Pike River chief executive Peter Whittall said the rescue would take weeks.

"Even if we move really quickly to make the mine safe for re-entry, it can still take a week or more, and if we re-enter the mine, it can still take us a couple of weeks to recover the men," he said.

Memorial service

Greymouth is preparing for a memorial service to honour the 29 miners, with up to 5,000 people expected to attend the service at the town's racecourse next Thursday afternoon.

Mr Kokshorn says next week's national memorial service will help the community grieve.

"We've picked the racecourse because it looks up the valley to where the Pike Mine is," he said.

"The fact that it's going to be here on the coast will be all we want, because initially they were going to have it in Christchurch; this is what they

normally do with national services like this," he said.

"But we asked the prime minister... we're just Coasters, people over here that like simple things, so we would like to have our men remembered in sight of the Paparoa Range where they lie now."

More than \$2 million has been donated to a trust fund set up to help the victims' families.

The board of Pike River Coal is meeting this morning to examine ways for the company to recover.

It is not sure when the mine will reopen but it has told employees they will continue to be paid until the new year.

Dream job took youngest NZ miner Joseph Dunbar's life

Extract from The Daily Telegraph, NSW



Relatives and friends of the 29 miners leave their morning meeting with New Zealand Prime Minister John Key / Pic: Brad Hunter Source: The Daily Telegraph

IN every tragedy it always gets around to the miracle survivor, the one who should have gone ... and didn't. Joseph Dunbar is not that kid.

All his life, Joseph wanted to be a miner and he wasn't the kind to wait around.

When he moved with his mother from Christchurch to Greymouth, he wanted a job in the mines as soon as he turned 17. He got a job at the Fresh Choice supermarket until that day, which came on November 18.

The day of the Pike River Mine explosion was November 19.

But that was all right. Joseph had the job but he was not due to start until the following Monday, November 22.



Loved his job ... miner Joseph Ray Dunbar, 17. Source: The Daily Telegraph

He would have been the great survival story. The kid who could nearly have been there but wasn't. Only Joseph was too good a kid.

"He wanted to do this for a very long time," his mum Pip Timms said.

So Joseph turned 17 and his mates wanted to take him out celebrating.

"No," Joseph said.

While they knew Joseph had got his job at the mine and was due to start the following Monday, what they didn't know was he'd convinced the boss to let him start the day after his birthday.

"I'm staying in," Joseph told his mates. "I have work in the morning."

"Chuffed" was how his mum described him that night. Joseph turned 17 and had the day with his mum.

"We spent the whole day together," she told the New Zealand Herald.

Nobody knew it at the time ... but Joseph was giving his mum a gift she will hold tight for the rest of her life.

"It's going to be my best memory to live by," his mum said. "We were very close.

"He was my baby - he was my world."

The next day, Joseph went along to the mine with Ms Timms' brother-in-law. He was on the afternoon shift at Pike River. Earlier in the day, the morning shift had been detonating explosives to breach a rock face that was too tough for their drills.

Joseph didn't know that.

All he knew was that he was keen to get started.

He was starting as an offsider but hoped to work hard and move up to be a driller. After a quick tour around the mine, Joseph was ready to start work.

His mother knew how proud he was.

There had been times in his life, a young man growing too quickly for the world he was inhabiting, when his cheeky nature had got him in trouble, but they all say it was in a loveable way.

We like to call them scallywags. He needed the bigger world, with real employment.

"It meant everything," his mum said. "He set himself a goal, and achieving that goal meant everything to him.

"It meant he was going to travel with the company, take him different places. He was absolutely stoked. He was excited, he was ecstatic."

After the tour, Ms Timms' brother-in-law sent him off to work, giving Joseph a thumbs-up as he approached the mine's entrance.

He watched Joseph turn and grin and give a thumbs-up back, and then he watched him walk into the mine, never to be seen again.

We like to collect the miracle survival stories and when everybody heard about Joseph and his

first day on the job - and 17 at that - there was great hope for the miracle that wouldn't come.

About 90 minutes after the shift began the mine exploded and then, on Wednesday, a second explosion ended any chance of anyone coming out alive. Inside rests Joseph Dunbar, aged 17 and one day.

NZ: Third explosion at mine site

Extract from tvnz.co.nz

A third explosion has occurred at the Pike River Coal mine on the West Coast where 29 miners have died.

Pike River management confirmed this to ONE News a short time ago.

The blast is said to have happened shortly after 3:30pm (local time).

The New Zealand Herald is reporting that it lasted for around 23 seconds.

Staff and emergency service workers had just attended a minute's silence for the 29 killed, at 3.44pm, a week on from the first blast.

The men were trapped inside the mine after it exploded last Friday afternoon and a second explosion on Wednesday ended any hope of their survival.

Pike River will make an announcement outside the Grey District council offices shortly.



A specialised robot to be sent from West Australia to the Pike River mine - Source: Supplied

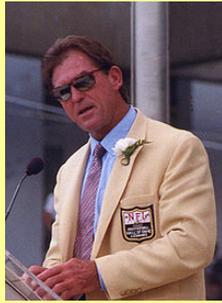
Robot inside Earlier today Pike had said a third robot was 1575m into the mine tunnel and had

detected debris and destruction in the main shaft.

This indicates Wednesday's explosion was much more violent than the first one, Pike River Coal CEO Peter Whittall said.

Two other robots sent into the mine earlier were damaged by the explosion.

Quote of the week



"You learnt that, whatever you are doing in life, obstacles don't matter very much. Pain or other circumstances can be there, but if you want to do a job bad enough, you'll find a way to get it done."

Jack Youngblood
(former American pro footballer, 1950-)

Saturday 27 November 2010

NSW: Mining towns share pain

Extract from Lithgow Mercury

IT was a sombre mood in mining communities across Australia this week as the nation shared the loss of 29 mineworkers in an underground methane explosion at Greymouth in New Zealand.

President of the CFMEU in the western field, Andy Honeysett, said yesterday the depth of the disaster would not be lost on anyone connected with mining anywhere in Australia.

He said the sympathy of all in the industry around Lithgow would go out to the families who had lost loved ones — not just the New Zealanders but also the two Australians, the South Africans and the British miners.

'Every mining family in Australia will be feeling for those people,' he said.

Mr Honeysett said the Pike River Mine disaster was a stark reminder of the inherent dangers in the mining industry.

He said it was fortunate that mines around Lithgow and in much of Australia do not have a methane gas problem that led to the Greymouth disaster.

The exception was the coal deposits in the Illawarra area.

But the accident was a wake up call for the need for constant vigilance against other hazards, including combustible coal gas.

Staff at the Western Mines Rescue Station in Lithgow were also closely watching the unfolding drama in New Zealand with a full appreciation of the dilemma facing rescue crews unable to enter the mine.



THE MINERS MEMORIAL IN QUOTA PARK AT BOWENFELS: This records the names of those killed in accidents in the mining industry around Lithgow in the past 126 years. Some 93 men have died in our mines since the first recorded fatality when a man named Haywood died at what was known as Main Camp Mine in July 1884

Superintendent at the Western Mines Rescue Station, Brian Kelly, said Australian mines rescue regulations had strict guidelines to be followed in rescue efforts following any incident, particularly in underground mines.

He said that while explosive methane was not a problem in the local area there were some areas where carbon monoxide could be encountered and rescue corps members were fully trained in the use of long duration breathing apparatus to deal with such situations.

The Miners Memorial in Quota Park lists the names of 93 men who have died in mining

related incidents in the local area since the first recorded death in 1884.

NZ: Fourth blast hits mine site

Extract from TVNZ.co.nz

A fourth explosion has rocked the Pike River Coal mine this afternoon.

Police said no one was injured and people working near the mine entrance were moved away for their own safety.

The blast hit at about 1:55pm.

It comes nine days after the initial blast, which left 29 miners trapped.

A second blast hit the mine on Wednesday, ending all hope the miners were still alive and a third rocked the Pike River Coal mine on Friday, almost exactly a week after the first blast.

Superintendent Dave Cliff says the latest explosion demonstrates the volatility of the environment surrounding the mine.

"Our focus continues to be on the safety of those people working at the mine site and the recovery team."

He says crews are doing all they can to progress the recovery operation, however the explosion reinforces the risks involved in working in the environment and the requirement to put people's safety first.

US mining expert Davitt McAteer, who was responsible for mine safety across the US in the 1980s, called for new technology to be applied to mines, especially to improve communications systems.

"Currently we're only relying on blind luck to know what's going on," he said on TV ONE's Q+A programme this morning.

He believes pressure has to be kept on companies to make sure they remain very diligent about taking precautions and to ensure prevention methods are put into place every single day.

"Our experience (the US) is if you don't put the requirements in the statute, and don't inspect to make certain it happens, they don't happen."

Sunday 28 November 2010

NZ: Highest inquiry sought over mine disaster

Extract from TVNZ.co.nz

The Prime Minister has confirmed that New Zealand's highest level of official inquiry will try to establish what went wrong at the Pike River coal mine last week.

John Key told TVNZ's Q+A show this morning that he will ask tomorrow's Cabinet meeting to approve a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the tragedy which left 29 mine workers presumed dead.

The last Royal Commission of Inquiry into an accident was for the Erebus crash while the Cave Creek disaster was investigated by a Commission of Inquiry.

"The differences are subtle but it is a demonstration to the 29 families that we are taking this inquiry absolutely seriously, we are determined to get answers for those families, and we will leave no stone unturned" said Key.

"I think a Royal Commission of Inquiry does give the gravitas and does demonstrate the significance of this national tragedy."

The inquiry will be made up of three people, headed by a judge.

Key said he had a judge in mind and would put that before Cabinet for approval. The other two members were yet to be determined but Key said that an international expert component was likely.

The Royal Commission will have the power to subpoena witnesses and gather information.

Cabinet would also set the terms of reference for the inquiry but Key said they would be "very broad".

The inquiry will focus on both the events leading up to the November 19 explosion and the subsequent response and rescue effort.

Key would not speculate on the findings, but said that the hard questions had to be answered.

"The future of Pike River and underground coal mining depends on this.

"We can't put people into situations that are dangerous"

Key said many jobs had an element of risk, but that risk needed to be mitigated. He said the mine cannot reopen until the Royal Commission inquiry is complete.

"There is a difference between risk which is managed and a dangerous environment."

The Royal Commission would run alongside inquiries by the police, the coroner and the Department of Labour.

Key said that those inquiries were likely to release their findings before the Royal Commission.

He would not speculate on whether any charges would be laid following those inquiries, but said that it was a possibility.

Union backing

The proposed Royal Commission has been endorsed by the EPMU.

The union represented 11 of the men that died and union leader Andrew Little said that the tragedy needs the highest level of inquiry.

Little said he expects workers to be fully represented in the inquiry.

However the Green Party is calling for independent worker representation on the Royal Commission.

"The make-up of the panel that conducts the Royal Commission will be critical to its credibility and ability to do its job," co-leader Russel Norman said.

"There needs to be a workers' representative on the panel to ensure that a workers' perspective is taken into account. The panel should not only consist of an industry expert and a judge.

Lawyer approached

The lawyer who represents the families of the Cave Creek tragedy says he has already been approached by West Coasters to prepare for a Pike River commission of inquiry.

Grant Cameron was the families' lawyer at the Cave Creek Commission of inquiry at Greymouth in 1995 which found systemic failure in the collapse of the Cave Creek platform that killed 14 people.

Cameron would not say which West Coasters had approached him but they are believed to be closely connected to the Pike River tragedy.

"There seems to be considerable concern around the issue of whether the police somehow prevented Mines Rescue people from immediately accessing the mine," Cameron said.

He said the Pike River families should continue to support each other and start to note down their concerns while disregarding "silly stories circulating about what did or didn't happen and about who did or didn't do particular things".

At some stage they are best to form a small committee of their own and then get expert advice on what options are before them," Cameron said.

Chile: Less media hype, more miners' rights

Extract from www.greenleft.org.au

Media fanfare has subsided around the October rescue of 33 miners from the San Jose mine in Chile — an event watched by an estimated 1 billion people across the globe.

But could this event at least help bring about change for miners' rights and conditions?

Unfortunately, if we look behind all the commotion and government rhetoric about

making big changes for the lives of miners in Chile, the answer seems to be no.

On November 7, two miners were killed in an accident in the Los Reyes mine near Copiapo, close to where the San Jose mine accident took place.

Meanwhile, more than 1500 Chilean workers at the world's third-largest copper mine, Collahuasi, are now into the third week of a strike. The mine's majority owners are Xstrata and AngloAmerican.

The miners' union is not only demanding a wage increase, but also better mine security. It argues the owners could afford to do better by their workers, given the mine's profits rose 36% last year to US\$1.56 billion.

Collahuasi is located in the Atacama desert, at a height of 4000 metres, where oxygen levels are low and stress levels are high.

Nor has life become better for the rescued San Jose miners and their fellow workers.

Some of them protested on October 18 at a religious ceremony organised to recall the 70 days that the miners were trapped 700 metres underground.

Chanting "we are not 33, we are 300" and "70 days without pay and work. Settlement now! Don't rob us", 13 of the 33 miners, together with several of their workmates, highlighted the fact that the rest of the San Jose miners have been left without jobs and are owed months of wages following the company's announcement of bankruptcy.

Meanwhile, Carlos Vilches, a parliamentarian who is part of the commission investigating the accident, has revealed that several San Jose miners have confirmed that just hours before the accident, workers had warned management the mine was about to collapse.

But the operations manager denied the miners' requests to return to the surface.

Jorge Gonzalez, president of the Chilean Forestry Workers union, told *Green Left Weekly* that in the days leading up to the disaster, "the local union had said its members would not enter because their lives were in danger.

"So the company got those 33 miners, among others that were there on the day, and told them to go to work.

"This [should not] happen either in the mines or in any other dangerous industry."

Gonzalez added: "As long as the interests of the companies to make profit override the health and safety of workers, these situations will continue."

Eduardo Rocco, vice president of the Chilean Miners Federation told *Rebellion* on November 6 that 18 miners have died in Chilean mines this year. (This was before the two recent fatalities, which takes the toll to 20).

Chilean unions are continuing to campaign to demand that the government abide by International Labour Organisation standards regarding mine safety and conditions.

Chile's billionaire president and former ally of the brutal Pinochet dictatorship, Sebastian Pinera, has refused to act.

"They create spaces for the company owners who are the minority, and don't open spaces for the participation of workers who are the majority", Rocco said

He noted: "One of the factors that has led to an increase in accidents is intimately related to the spike in the price of copper, where the industry in general has increased its production to get a better deal, which directly affects our security.

"In large parts of the mining industry, 12 hour working days have been authorised, which has impacted with a 50% overload of work and 50% more possibility of work accidents."

As long as those in government continue to put profits first, these "accidents" will continue to take place.

Real lasting change will require fighting for a government that puts people and the environment above corporate interests.

NZ: Coasters may not get over tragedy

Extract from Sunday News, NZ



People wait for news after the mining accident at the Moura Coal mines in Qld 1986.

AN Aussie miner who survived a mine explosion with nine of his mates says the West Coast may never get over the Pike River tragedy.

Eleven miners were killed when an explosion ripped through the Moura mine in Queensland in 1994 but Jim Parsons got out alive.

He says he lives with what happened down the mine every day and Coasters may never recover from their disaster.

"I don't think you ever get over it," he said. "It's taken me years to get my life back on track."

Parsons was about 2km underground when the explosion occurred, and although he was convinced he was going to die, he and nine others made it out.

Eleven miners were not so lucky and just like Pike River, a build-up of toxic gases stopped rescuers going in, and attempts were abandoned after a second explosion 18 hours later.

The mine was blocked up and the bodies were never recovered.

Underground mining at Moura was stopped and the area was converted into an open-cut coal mine.

Parsons said Moura, like Greymouth, relied on mining. It had still not recovered.

"The community has never got over it and I'm not sure it ever will. So many lives were lost and so many families torn apart. Only 10 of us got out – it was a huge tragedy," he said.

Parsons felt guilty he had survived while so many of his mates died. "It took me yonks to deal with it. I kept blaming myself, thinking I could have done more. It's been tough, really tough."

This week in mining accident history

28 November 1908

Rachel and Agnes Mine

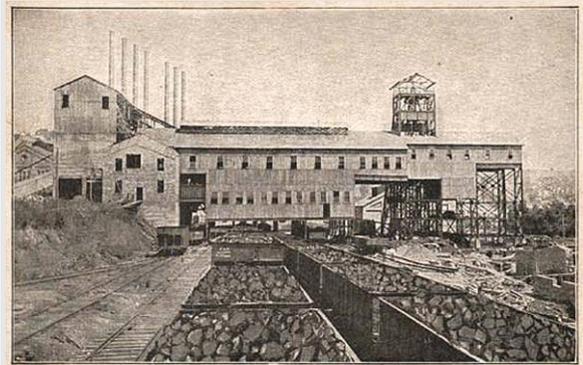
Marianna, Pennsylvania, USA

Underground coal mine

154 killed by explosion of gas and dust

Source: www.usmra.com

The disaster occurred about 10:45 on Monday morning. All employees in the mine were killed but one.



MARIANNA TIPPLE—The largest soft coal tipple in the world, 10,000 tons capacity daily. Marianna is the largest and most modern Bituminous mine in the world.

The Marianna Tipple was the most modern Bituminous mine in the world when it was built in August 1906. President Theodore Roosevelt and mining experts from Europe toured the Marianna Plant on October 14, 1908.

As the fan casing was destroyed and the top of the outlet shaft and headframe badly wrecked, it was several hours before ventilation could be partly restored.

By Wednesday morning all the bodies had been removed, except those covered by the debris and water.

The mine was badly wrecked, stoppings destroyed, timbers dislodged and roof fallen.



Photo Postcard taken at the scene of the accident

Ventilation was more than ample. All stoppings and overcasts were of brick or concrete, and the workings were ventilated by six separate air splits with brattice cloth used to conduct air from the last open crosscut to the faces.

Explosive gas in generated in the mine which is worked generally with open lights.

Much fine dust was produced in cutting, blasting, and hauling. A water system was used but was ineffective to thoroughly wet the dust.

A blown-out shot in the face of No. 3 Blanche entry was the initial point of the explosion, igniting dust and gas. A secondary explosion occurred in the main dip entries where an accumulation of gas had been found and men removed shortly before the disaster.

A committee of experienced mining engineer made an investigation and report at the request of the chief mining inspector. Their findings agreed with those of the State mine inspectors and included some conclusions and recommendations regarding the control of explosion hazards that were repeated hundreds of times in the next 30 or more years.

"We feel that it should be recognized that mines liberating gas and producing dust have to face the danger of ignition from three principal causes: open lights, blown-out shots, and electric sparks. To reduce these dangers to a minimum, without forcing conditions that would sacrifice the value of property, should be the aim

of our future laws. We feel that the danger of open lights can be more easily eliminated than the other two, and we do not believe it is a hardship to enforce the use of improved safety lamps in any or all mines that have given off or are apt to give off explosive gas.

It is a recognized necessity that in mining the Pittsburgh coal, other means than hand-pick mining must be employed. It can be blasted under proper regulations with a minimum amount of danger. To do this we feel that it is necessary that competent shotfirers be employed who shall have charge of, and be responsible not only for the firing of the shot, but for the quantity and quality of the explosives used.; that all holes be tamped with clay; that the shot firers use only permissible explosives as furnished by the company; that all shots be fired by an electric battery; and that blasting for the complete safety of the miners be done only between shifts, when men are out of the mine.

We recognize at the present time that one of the most dangerous conditions at any mine is the accumulation of dust. To prepare and take care of it is a serious problem, and we cannot but recommend that the same care as used in the Marianna mine for distributing water for saturating the dust be employed in every mine under like conditions. We also feel that it is not simply a question of the sprinkling of the dust, but it should be a saturation; that unless the coal dust is saturated, the sprinkling does not accomplish the purpose. We also feel that in all mines where machines are used for undercutting the coal, the accumulations of fine coal and dust should be loaded out of the mine before shooting.

We recognize the present estimated commercial value of the use of electricity in mines, but we can only recommend its use in intake air currents, believing there is sufficient power otherwise attainable to do the necessary work as economically; and in eliminating electricity from all gaseous parts of the mine we remove as great a danger as the open light.

The miner should realize his importance as a factor in not only safeguarding his own life, but those of his fellow-employees by faithfully following rules and regulations prescribed, and his education should be first on these lines; That the employer and employee working together for mutual protection under intelligent guidance will reduce liability to accident by explosion by removing the causes.

We realize that to follow out on these lines of our recommendations may mean increased costs of operating expenses, and hardships might result between competitive fields unless similar laws are enforced in all such fields."

The chief mine inspector gave thought to the recognized fact that disastrous explosions were occurring with alarming frequency in mines that were deemed to be models of safe planning and management. His conclusions approached but did not stress the fact that both State and company officials neglected to train and supervise the practices of mines and coal loaders.

His summary declared:

"It is regretted that explosions of this kind cannot be entirely prevented, but while that is impossible they could be greatly reduced in number if all the persons concerned in mining would cooperate intelligently in their work.

Personal responsibility enters largely into this matter, for it is known and has often been demonstrated that the oversight, neglect and carelessness of one person in a mine may cause the death of hundreds of others.

This uncertainty is always present, and often when we think a mine, such as the Marianna, is safe, someone becomes heedless of the rules and regardless of consequences, and as a result an explosion occurs.

Nor is it always the ignorant foreigner who is the culprit; frequently the most intelligent miner, overconfident regarding the safety of the mine, is the one to bring on disaster. It is very evident, however, that it is the plain duty of the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to teach the foreign miners the language of the country and how to mine coal with safety to themselves and to others."

Source:

 *Historical Summary of Mine Disasters in the United States - Volume I*

Monday 29 November 2010

NZ: Fire burning at site of mine tragedy

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

A fire is burning underground at the Pike River Coal Mine on New Zealand's west coast after a fourth explosion at the site yesterday.

Twenty-nine miners perished last week after a series of explosions ripped through the mine.

The latest explosion has now forced mine authorities to re-evaluate plans to recover the miners' bodies.

Police say the coal fire is visible from the air above a ventilation shaft which was also damaged by the latest explosion.

Pike River Coal CEO Peter Whittall said authorities had planned to use a specialist machine from Australia to aid the body recovery, but that might now have to be put on hold.

"The GAG is still the best option [to retrieve the bodies]," he said of the device which would use water vapour and gases to purge oxygen from the mine.

"But they're also assessing now whether that can be used or whether they may be better off sealing the mine - not forever, just sealing it - which helps to starve the mine of oxygen."

Royal commission

Meanwhile, the country's prime minister, John Key, will today take a proposal for a royal commission into the tragedy to cabinet.

Mr Key says a royal commission is the most powerful investigation available under New Zealand law.

It would be chaired by a judge and have the power to compel witnesses to testify, leaving no stone unturned in the search for the cause of the blasts.

Unions have backed the call for the inquiry, but say it should be larger and include representatives of the lost workers and their families.

China: Coal Mine Cable Cart Accident Kills 2, Injures 24

Extract from CRIENGLISH.COM

Two miners were killed and 24 others injured after the cable carts they were riding in sped out of control in a coal mine shaft Sunday in east China's Shandong Province, local safety authorities said Monday.

Altogether 26 miners were in the cable carts on their way down the shaft when the gear box of the winch broke Sunday morning in the Lianhuashan Coal Mine in Xintai City. The carts raced out of control, throwing some of the workers out, said a spokesman with the provincial coal mine safety supervision bureau.

As of Monday noon, two workers had died in hospital and three of the 24 injured were still in critical condition, according to the spokesman.

Wednesday 30 November 2010

BHP mine worker dies in South Africa

Extract from The Daily Telegraph, Sydney, Aus

BHP Billiton says a 37-year-old man has died following an accident at the company's underground Wessels manganese mine in South Africa on Sunday.

Operations at Wessels, one of the Hotazel manganese mines, have been suspended while an investigation is conducted into the cause of the accident.

BHP says it is providing support to the family of employee Thaboetsile Justice Mabale, who died following the accident.

BHP owns a 60 per cent interest in the Hotazel manganese mines through its shareholding in Samancor Manganese.

NZ: New fire hits Pike River mine

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

A new fire at New Zealand's Pike River coal mine has further delayed efforts to recover the bodies of 29 miners who died in underground explosions.

A fire broke out at the portal of the mine this morning, but it is unrelated to the coal fire which continues to burn underground.

Police say the fire started when foam being used to seal the mine self-combusted.

Experts say this is not unusual when the foam is used in such large quantities.

No-one was hurt and the fire was extinguished without further incident.

Work to seal the mine and deploy a GAG jet engine will resume once the portal has been cooled and reassessed.

Authorities hope to use the machine to purge oxygen from the mine.

For the families of the victims, the new fire is just one more delay in a process which some believe never really got started.

VIC: WorkSafe to probe mine rockfall injury

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Bendigo Mining and WorkSafe will investigate a rockfall that critically injured a man in the Kangaroo Flat mine on Sunday.

Paramedics say the 48 year-old suffered chest, rib, leg and internal injuries when the rock crushed him in the mine.

The company's chief executive, Rod Hanson, says such an event is completely unacceptable.

NZ: Inquiry questions could improve mine safety

Extract from the Wanganui Chronicle, NZ

At the Strongman mine, blasting (or shot-firing) disturbed old workings and allowed a gas into the workings, so with knowledge of this problem in the Brunner seam, why did the company continue with shot-blasting at Pike River? Dave Feickert, mine safety expert A Wanganui-based mine safety expert reckons a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Pike River tragedy could be asking questions that ensure safe work practices for all New Zealand miners in future.

Dave Feickert told the Wanganui Chronicle that one overarching question the commission should ask is whether the system of safety supervision in legislation and practice is sufficient to guarantee safety.



Dave Feickert

An explosion at the Pike River mine killed 29 miners and subsequent explosions have stymied any efforts to recover their bodies.

Mr Feickert has been recognised for his work helping to improve coal mine safety and health in China's accident-prone mining industry and working with other foreign advisers he has helped cut the accident rate by 70 per cent in the past five years.

He said the commission would probably ask what risk assessments Pike River Coal did before it began mining and what risk management systems it put in place to continually monitor those risks on a daily basis.

Mr Feickert said he also expected the inquiry to find out if Pike River Coal had a gas management plan in place from the moment it started mining near Greymouth, if it instituted a system to clear gas from the mine, and if not, why not?

"At the Strongman mine, blasting (or shot-firing) disturbed old workings and allowed a gas into the workings, so with knowledge of this problem in the Brunner seam, why did the company continue with shot-blasting at Pike River?" Mr Feickert said.

"There was an electricity outage reported immediately before the explosion.

So is the company aware of the cause of this, or whether the miners restarted the system just before the explosion?

"And the commission should be asking if there was any monitoring back to the control room or electricity supply in the pit."

He said it would probably want to know if any geological surveys were carried out on the likelihood of gas outbursts in the coal seam that Pike River was mining.

"The commission will also question the methods of gas monitoring that were in place at the mine too. The company's chief executive, Peter Whittall, has said there was continuous monitoring for methane in 'parts of the mine' so it's important to establish where."

Mr Feickert said the inquiry would probably want to be reassured about inspections of the mine, when these were carried out and who did them.

"Were there pre-shift inspections by mine deputies and where are their records over the last 12 months?

He expected the inquiry to be completed in about six months.

S.Africa: Learning to play it safe

Extract from www.timeslive.co.za

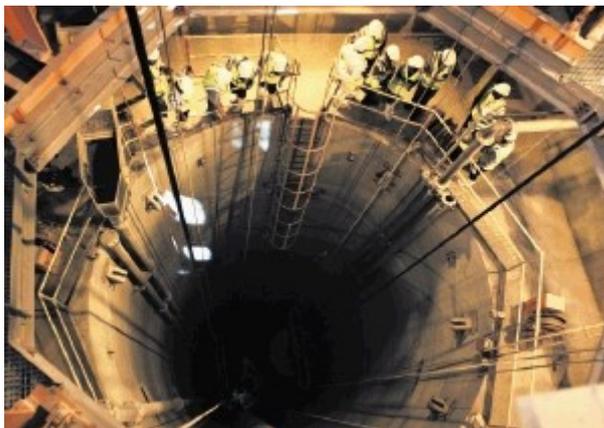
The goal of 'zero harm' is laudable, but is it realistic? asks Jim Jones

The Big Read: Some 25 years ago, I recall, the visiting labour editor of the US magazine Business Week was flabbergasted at a Joburg newspaper's nonchalant reporting of the deaths of several South African gold miners in an underground accident.

It would have been front-page news in the US - in Johannesburg in those days, the deaths merited a tiny report on an inside page that noted the deaths along with the then-important reassurance that production had not been affected.

Imagine this happening today. Back in the early 1970s, when South Africa was producing more than half of the world's gold, 500 or 600 gold miners lost their lives in accidents each year. Today, and measured against the amount of gold produced or the number of men employed in the gold sector - the only means of comparing like with like - the death rate is a third of that of the 1970s. We're getting better. Or are we? And how?

Is it possible (given that much of South Africa's narrow-reef mining is, perforce, labour intensive and inherently dangerous) to achieve the goal of "zero harm"?



LONG WAY TO GO: Supervisors need to heed advice from subordinates to achieve a working environment in which every miner takes responsibility for his own and his colleagues' safety Picture: MARIANNE SCHWANKHART

In parts of the gold sector there have been substantial safety improvements, driven from the top. AngloGold Ashanti spokesman Alan Fine points to fewer and fewer overall deaths, while the proportion due to falls of ground has simultaneously been reducing. Others in the

industry concur - accidents these days can often be the result of people cutting corners or, anecdotally, sometimes from downright bloody-mindedness.

It is all very well safety being a leading preoccupation from top management down - it's what happens at the working face that matters. Talking to a group of middle managers the other day, the conversation quickly turned to the effects of race relations on safety. Their concern was that some white overseers were becoming reluctant to give instructions to black subordinates for fear of being tagged racist and that, as a result, the sort of discipline necessary underground is often not applied.

If this sounds far fetched, it is worth recalling the recent case at Impala Platinum's Marula mine where a group of black miners accused a white supervisor of racial abuse. The man denied it, but it was his word against his colleagues'. An investigation found that the racial charges had resulted from other animosities.

While all this might seem to show that there's a long way to go before racial tensions or animosities that can affect safety cease, attitude changes are needed. Mines, perhaps, cannot be run top down, military-style. Supervisors need to heed advice from subordinates.

There's also the question of whether poorer mines can afford the safety precautions applied by their richer counterparts. A recurrent expression of disquiet from men whose job it is to produce ore is of the costs - to morale, safety and revenues - of wholesale closures of mines following fatal accidents. It might be possible to close a rich mine such as Kloof for a couple of days, but what of a marginal operation such as Blyvooruitzicht, already teetering on the edge of profitability? Men's jobs are at stake.

The Department of Mineral Resources had already been ordering total mine closure following fatal accidents when, some years back, Anglo American CEO Cynthia Carroll was one of the first bosses to anticipate the DMR by

herself ordering that thousands of underground workers be withdrawn and production halted after a fatal accident at Anglo Platinum's Rustenburg operations.

This, so critics believe, endorsed the DMR's approach. An extreme view is that many inspectors are ill qualified for their job, but that they took the view that if closure was okay for Anglo's boss, it should be okay for the DMR and other mines. Meantime, the DMR is devoting considerable resources to expanding and skilling its inspectorate.

The Rustenburg mine stretches over 30km and, so the argument goes: Why close down the entire operation, which is largely operating safely, because of an event in one small part? The analogy was drawn with the chaos that would ensue were the Metro Police to halt all traffic in Joburg for days because of one accident on the corner of Market and Harrison.

Certainly, mine closures can focus managements' and miners' attention on safety, particularly if everyone attends safety training during the closures. And closures certainly grab the headlines. More importantly, the message is that safety equates with profits - safety failures can be costly.

But, and it's a big but, wholesale closures can create their own problems. Leave working places unattended, and conditions deteriorate, affecting safety. And miners' morale suffers, particularly when stoppages affect wages. As it is, the industry and the DMR are patiently discussing the best way forward - focused or targeted closures rather than sweeping ones.

The question of mine safety is not going to be settled overnight. Arguably, though, the process is well in place at, for example, AngloGold and described by CEO Mark Cutifani at his recent quarterly results presentation. The aim is a working environment in which every miner takes responsibility for his own and his colleagues' safety. Men with years of experience and an intimate knowledge of their particular workplaces

are arguably the best at spotting safety risks. They are correct, if they believe a workplace is unsafe, to initiate a withdrawal from the risky area.

No one has the sure-fire answer to eliminating mine fatalities or injuries altogether. Years back, when the Chamber of Mines awarded its "Millionaire Shield" to mines that managed a million man shifts without killing someone, the approach was retrospective. Recognition for something already achieved.

Now, the approach is prospective: What do we need to do - training, equipment, fresh attitudes, whatever - to curb accidents? But, for all this, can anyone say how any miner might have prevented or foreseen the recent accident at the Aquarius platinum mine when an 18m-thick block crashed from the hanging wall? That was a failure of mine design, not something to be blamed on worker carelessness.

QLD: Mine risk management forum

Extract from www.uq.edu.au

Australian and international mining industry experts will discuss how to improve mine risk management practices in a forum at The University of Queensland (UQ) today (Tuesday, 30 November 2010).

UQ's Minerals Industry Safety and Health Centre (MISHC) is hosting the forum titled "Effective Risk Management in 2010: An Australian Minerals Industry Perspective".

Forum organiser, Associate Professor Philipp Kirsch, said the value of risk management and the need to regularly re-assess risks in mining would be discussed.

"This forum will look at how site level risk management and corporate risk management combine to help improve the business," Mr Kirsch said.

"Panelists will be asked to share recent developments and discuss moving risk management theory and application forward to

improve risk management practices in the minerals industry.”

Mr Kirsch said risks were not static and there were many examples in the Australian minerals industry of fluctuating corporate risks and operational hazards.

“In some cases, threats or hazards that were initially assessed to be a moderate risk increase to higher risk levels, even catastrophic levels,” Mr Kirsch said.

“If risk assessments are not reviewed after these changes, controls become inadequate and losses occur. “

Mr Kirsch said most mines have a documented Safety Health Management System (SHMS) that on paper meets the requirements of legislation.

“However, the key to improving the safety of mines is for the workforce to have an active understanding and involvement with their site's SHMS,” he said.

“The most perfectly written procedures are useless without an understanding of how to implement and apply them into every task within the mine.

“A safe mine and mine culture does not happen by accident, it takes planning, effort, team participation and continual review.”

World leader in the development and implementation of risk management practices in the minerals industry and MISCH director, Professor Jim Joy, will facilitate the forum.

Forum speakers will include Erik Mather (Managing Director of Regnan); Tony Macko (Corporate Secretary of Centennial Coal); John Summer (Chief Risk Advisor for Rio Tinto); Martin Webb (Vice President Risk at BHP Billiton); John Hempenstall (Chief Risk Officer of Centennial Coal); and Peter Wilkinson (risk management consultant).

For more information go to the website <http://www.dyadem.com/riskconference/>

Wednesday 1 December 2010

Australian to help retrieve bodies at NZ mine

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

New Zealand police have called in an Australian mining expert to help recover the bodies of 29 miners killed last week at the Pike River coal mine.

The 29 men - including two Australians from Queensland, two Britons and a South African - were trapped 2.5 kilometres in the mine by a gas explosion on November 19.

A fifth explosion was reported earlier on Monday.



Earlier Tuesday, a fire broke out at the portal of the mine (AAP: Iain McGregor)

The volatile conditions underground are hampering efforts to coordinate the recovery of bodies.

Police say the expert, who does not want to be named, arrived on the west coast this afternoon to meet with recovery coordinators.

Inspector Gary Knowles says the visitor is a recognised world authority on situations such as this.

He says the expert has been monitoring the situation closely from his Queensland home.

"We have been speaking to him daily. He's been watching our readings," Inspector Knowles said.

"He's been watching the mine as it moves up and down and how it lives and breathes.

"Having him on site today is an integral part of the operation."

Authorities hope to have a jet engine sealed into place and operating at the portal of the mine by tomorrow.

They hope to use the machine to purge oxygen from the mine.

Earlier today, a fire broke out at the portal of the mine after foam being used to seal the mine self-combusted.

Experts say this is not unusual when the foam is used in such large quantities.

No-one was hurt and the fire was extinguished without further incident.

China mine flood traps at least seven

Extract from RIA Novosti

At least 7 miners trapped in flooded coalmine in central China

At least seven rescuers are trapped underground in a flooded coalmine in central China, Xinhua news agency reported on Wednesday.

The Yide coalmine in Xiangtan City in central China's Hunan Province was flooded on Tuesday, however no details of the incident were provided.

Rescuers are currently pumping the water out of the coalmine and are searching for the missing miners, the agency said.

Hope Fades for Trapped Miners in Central China

Extract from CRIENGLISH.COM

Experts and rescuers said Wednesday there was little hope of finding seven miners trapped underground alive after a coal mine was flooded nearly one day earlier in Hunan Province.

The flood happened at 11:38 p.m. Tuesday in a pit at the Yide Coal Mine in Xiangtan County, trapping seven miners at a depth of 89 meters, said Zhao Jun, one of the experts involved in the rescue operation.

The miners were believed to be stranded in a tiny area and it is possible they have drowned, said Zhao, who is also the chief engineer of Hunan's Coal Industry Bureau.

In addition, the oxygen density was tested to be 8 percent at a depth of 83 meters in the flooded pit, indicating less oxygen at the level where the miners were trapped, which increases the possibility of suffocation, rescuers said.

However, rescuers are still trying to install more pumps to drain the water.

A spokesman with the emergency rescue headquarters said Yide, a small mine that had doubled its annual output to 60,000 tonnes after recently merging with a neighboring mine, had been warned due to safety concerns, both orally and in writing, over the past four weeks.

Senior executives and major shareholders of the mine are now in police custody.

USA: Don Blankenship tells media he believes MSHA's Upper Big Branch mine investigation is a 'cover up'

Extract from Examiner.com

Last week Don Blankenship called local and national media to his Boone County office. During the meeting Blankenship clearly accused MSHA of impeding their investigation into the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion.

According to Blankenship MSHA hasn't let Massey in the mine on occasions when they were prepared to continue their own investigation. He claims Massey investigators were kept out several times while MSHA was in the mine. He called MSHA's treatment of Massey unprecedented at a one point called it a cover up.

MSHA has repeatedly blamed improper rock dusting and excess coal dust as the main factor in the deadly explosion. Blankenship says he does not believe coal dust played any role and instead blames natural gas.

According to Blankenship the crack in the mine floor is in an area that methane detectors would not have immediately picked up its presence. Blankenship believes they have evidence that the men knew something was wrong and turned off the machines. He also says that it is his belief that one of the machines was dropped hit sandstone and caused a spark that caused the explosion.

There were natural gas outbursts at the Upper Big Branch Mine in 2003 and 2004.

Blankenship again attacked MSHA's ventilation plans. He stands by his statement that MSHA forced ventilation changes that Massey was uncomfortable with.

Blankenship says that Massey plans to release video from inside the mine as well as their investigation findings in the next few weeks.

Thursday 2 December 2010

NZ: Miner's family humbled by strangers' support

Extract from www.tvnz.co.nz

The family of Michael Monk, one of the miners who died in the Pike River mine explosion last week, have released an emotional statement thanking people for their support.



Michael Monk - Source: Supplied

"It has been a harrowing time for all the families and we have certainly drawn strength from the love of our family and friends and the unwavering support from the West Coast community," it read.

"We have also been humbled by the kindness of strangers, and knowing the whole country has shared our grief has been very comforting."

The family said they are honoured to "stand alongside the other 28 families and mourn the loss of all our men" at today's remembrance service.

The service, which starts at 1.58pm today, is expected to be attended by up to 10,000 people.

Prime Minister John Key will be among those gathered, along with Governor General Anand Satyanand.

Pike River CEO Peter Whittall will address the gathering. Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn will also speak.

While the Greymouth community gathers at Omoto racecourse for the service, work will continue at the mine site, where recovery teams are still working on making the mine safe for entry.

A GAG unit brought in from Australia has been working on quelling a fire in the mine since 10pm last night.

The Monk family acknowledge the recovery of the men from the Pike River mine is going to be a long, slow process for everyone. They say they have "appreciated all the support and the love shown for Michael".

The statement also gives details of a more private service, to be held on Saturday, the day Michael would have celebrated his 24th birthday.

Family, close friends and representatives from the local Blaketown rugby club and West Coast Rugby union Heartland side will all pay their tributes at St Patrick's church in Greymouth from 11am.

"People have come from all over the world to be here with us and before they went home we wanted to give them the opportunity to share their memories and to say goodbye to Michael

on the day we would have been celebrating his 24th birthday."

The family expressed the need for people to mark the passing of "a young man who was universally admired and held in very high regard".

'Gag unit' purging air from NZ mine

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

A specialist Australian machine had been deployed to extinguish an inferno at a New Zealand colliery where 29 men died, police said today.

Police said the machine, a modified jet engine known as a "gag unit", began operating at the Pike River colliery late on Wednesday and would continue until it was safe for emergency crews to enter and retrieve the miners' bodies.



Starting operation: The gag unit is set up at the mouth of the mine shaft (AAP)

"This is just a first step and we have a long way to go before the environment will be safe enough to send a recovery team into the mine," police Superintendent Gary Knowles said.

The machine uses water vapour and gases to purge oxygen from the mine, suffocating the blaze.

The 29 men, which include two Australians from Queensland, two Britons and a South African, were trapped 2.5 kilometres in the mine by a gas explosion on November 19.

They were confirmed dead when another blast hit five days later, in New Zealand's worst pit disaster for almost a century.

Today a remembrance service, which was expected to draw about 11,000 people, was held at Greymouth's Omoto racetrack, in the shadow of the Paparoa mountain range, where the mine is located.

The service began with two minutes' silence.

The centrepiece was 29 tables, each bearing a miner's helmet surrounded by mementos of the dead men placed by their families.

As well as New Zealanders, the victims included two men from Queensland, two Britons and a South African.

New Zealand holds memorial service for miners killed in blast

Extract from guardian.co.uk



John Key at the national memorial service for the 29 miners killed in a blast at the Pike River mine. Photograph: Martin Hunter/Getty Images

Line of 29 black-draped tables bear miner's helmet, lamp, name and some personal possessions

New Zealand today held a national remembrance service for the 29 coalminers killed in an explosion last month.

A line of 29 black-draped tables each bore a miner's helmet, lamp and name.

The Pike River mine was rocked by an explosion on 19 November, trapping the men underground. A second major blast, five days later, dashed hopes that any had survived. Their bodies have still not been recovered.

Two more explosions have occurred since, including one on Sunday that shot flames into

the air, indicating that a raging coal fire is continuing to burn.

More than 10,000 mourners attended the open-air service under a sunny sky at Greymouth's Omoto Racecourse, on the South Island.

People across New Zealand paused for a two-minute silence before the service. Flags on government buildings nationwide flew at half mast.

Relatives of the victims placed photos, tributes and personal items – including clothing, a rugby ball, surfboards, a guitar and a cricket bat – alongside the miners' helmets on the tables.

Men, women and children, many weeping, filed quietly past the tables to pay their respects.

"In a very real sense, those men are with us because of those tables," Rev Tim Mora, who led the service, told the crowd.

Grieving father Lawrie Drew said he would not feel a sense of closure until the body of his son, Zen, had been recovered. "It's not closure for me. Not until I see the body," he told the Stuff news website.

The New Zealand prime minister, John Key, said the nation's 4 million people were standing behind the region's tight-knit community.

"We hoped ... they would emerge from the depths of the Earth," he told the mourners. "But they never came home."

Recovery teams started a jet engine known as the "gag" machine overnight yesterday, blowing inert gases and water vapour into the burning mine in an attempt to put out the underground fire.

Police Superintendent Gary Knowles told reporters that, once the explosive gases were expelled, work to cool soaring temperatures inside the mine would begin, allowing the miners' bodies to be recovered. However, mine experts have warned it would be a slow process, he said.

Foreign diplomats, including high commissioners from Australia, Britain and South Africa, who lost citizens in the disaster, were also at the service.

NZ: Aussie miner's family prepare for sad trip home

Extract from www.tvnz.co.nz

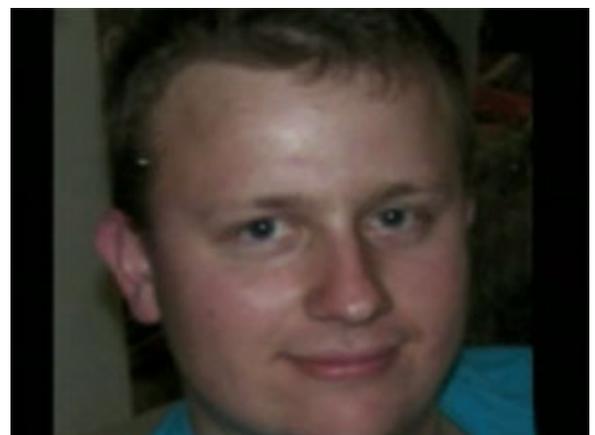
The family of Australian miner Joshua Ufer, one of the 29 men lost in the Pike River disaster, have spoken to ONE News about their special tribute.

Each of the Pike River miners had a dedicated table at today's remembrance service, decorated by their loved ones.

Deciding what to put on Joshua's table has been a big decision for his family.

A teddy bear, a Ford emblem and a ticket to the V8 Supercar Championship series on the Gold Coast were the centrepieces of the 25-year-old father-to-be's table.

"That's basically Joshua," Ufer's mother Joanne said about the ornaments.



Joshua Ufer - Source: ONE News

Joanne bought the teddy bear the first day she arrived in Greymouth from Australia.

"I saw its little outfit ... it's got 'daddy and me' on it, and it was for Josh when he got out."

Sadly that was never to be.

Joshua's partner Rachelle Weaver is expecting the couple's first child in May.

Joanne says Joshua's unborn baby will come at the right time, and will be like having a little piece of the man they loved so much.

"I think deep down I still wanted to hope that Josh could get out. But we kind of know that's not it anymore...so we just have to stay strong."

Baby photos of her son have provided a source of strength.

They were the first things Joanne grabbed to bring to New Zealand after she got the terrible news.

"That's my little boy, he's always gonna be my little boy."

Joshua's little sister Kymberley Ufer says her brother was a good man, who got better as he got older.

Now she and her mum face the return home to Australia without him.

"I really wanted to take Josh home, I still do," said Joanne.

"It's not knowing the effect of leaving Greymouth and leaving Josh behind - what effect that's really going to have on us until we hit Australian soil again."

NZ: Firm gives \$100k to relief fund

Extract from press.co.nz

A Christchurch City Council-owned company will give \$100,000 to the Pike River mine relief fund today.

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker will present Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn with the cheque in Greymouth. The money, from Christchurch City Holdings Ltd (CCHL), follows a \$50,000 donation from CCHL subsidiary Lyttelton Port of Christchurch.

"Our hearts go out to the 29 families who have lost someone in this horrible accident and to the whole West Coast community as it tries to come to terms with what has happened," Parker said.

Despite 2010 being a year that had tested the resilience of South Islanders, the year had also brought communities and districts across the Mainland closer, he said.

"Following the Canterbury earthquake, we were touched by the generosity and support shown by our friends on the West Coast, and now we have a chance to support them in their time of need," he said.

Friday 3 December 2010

NZ: Pike River confident mine will operate again

Extract from www.tvnz.co.nz

Pike River management says it's confident of getting the mine up and running again.

The West Coast mine shut down on November 19 after an explosion, which left 29 miners and contractors trapped. A second explosion five days later dashed any remaining hopes of finding the missing men alive.

Speaking the day after thousands of mourners gathered for a remembrance service in Greymouth, Pike River Coal chairman John Dow said getting the mine working again was definitely feasible.

"I don't want to put a time frame on it but we absolutely believe we can recover the business," he told Radio New Zealand.

"I've been saying to the team here 'there are three things we've got to do'. We've got to recover our men, we've got to recover our business, then we've got to make sure we properly interface with the three inquiries."

Dow said concern for the mine's future had increased as the severity of the situation became clearer, when third and fourth explosions rocked the site.

"After the first explosion on November 19, we thought the problem of recovering the ground would be putting out a gas fire.

"Last Sunday when we had the fourth explosion that set the coal on fire, that darkened the outlook significantly," he said.



Pike River CEO Peter Whittall and Chairman John Dow - Source: NZPA

"It extended the period of time that we'd be engaged in this recovery process, and time works against you when the money clock is ticking."

Dow said all the mine's workers remained on the payroll, but some contractors had lost jobs.

"We've given force majeure notices to the coal freight people, we're obviously not sending any coal out," he said.

"We'll be talking to other goods and service suppliers next week and coming to some kind of understanding with them about what happens next."

Dow said the company was not under pressure from banks, and it had renegotiated a 90-day standstill period on loan agreements following the first explosion.

The jet-propelled GAG machine brought in from Australia to help extinguish the fires burning in the mine was working well, Dow said.

It was not clear how long the machine would need to be used for, although it was likely to be several days yet.

Once that air was stabilised, work would begin to cool the mine to allow recovery teams to retrieve the men's bodies.

NZ: Mine GAG machine to work throughout weekend

Extract from nz.news.yahoo.com

A jet-propelled machine brought in from Australia to extinguish the fire in the Pike River mine is expected to work throughout the weekend.

It is hoped that the GAG (Gorniczny Agregat Gasniczy) machine will put out the fires with the use of water vapour so teams can attempt to retrieve the bodies of the 29 men from the West Coast mine.



The specially designed jet engine, GAG, in action working to clear the mine of gases

The machine began pumping CO2 into the mine on Wednesday night, and police said today the fire was being gradually suppressed.

"The results so far are positive but this will be a long process," Tasman area police commander Superintendent Gary Knowles said.

"We're likely to be talking weeks rather than hours or days."

Mr Knowles said the machine would continue to be run throughout today and through the weekend.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

A

- AIR** Ventilation air current.
- AIR COURSE** A passage through which air is circulated.

-Ed