



# Mining Accident News No.1108

6 to 14 March 2011

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Sunday 6 March 2011

## USA Nevada mine death: Questions on called-off rescue

*Extract from Forbes Magazine & Associated Press*

RENO, Nev. -- A worker plunges deep into an abandoned mine shaft. Nearly 200 feet down, video images show he is injured but still breathing, trapped by debris.

The century-old shaft, though, is extremely unstable, its walls crumbling. As one rescuer tries to descend to reach the man, he is hit by a large rock, which splits his hard-hat. Other efforts yield more falling rocks and clear evidence: This is going to be a dangerous mission - maybe too dangerous.

The scenario unfolded underneath Nevada last week, when rescue teams were told to stand down in their bid to reach Devin Westenskow, a 28-year-old father of five, even as they had evidence he was still alive.

But the ethical questions are more universal: How do you balance the desire to save a human being in peril with the equally important priority of keeping emergency workers safe and alive to rescue another day?

"You're playing God in a sense," said Rob McGee, secretary-treasurer of the United States Mine Rescue Association.

McGee said he can't recall of a mine rescue operation that was halted while someone was still alive. But, he noted, a rescue gone awry compounds such a tragedy, adding another layer of grief. Only officials on the ground can know how best to proceed, he said.

"Whoever made the call in Nevada I'm sure they're hearing it from both ends because there's always someone who's saying, 'No, don't give up,'" McGee said.

Indeed, family members of Westenskow praised rescuers for their efforts and, in a joint statement, said they understood when told early Friday of the decision to call off the rescue effort.

"It was extremely difficult for all of those involved with the rescue attempt. We all sat there in shock and disbelief trying to process the terrible news," said a family statement released Sunday by Ronald Schrempp, an uncle of the victim's mother. "Family members offered prayers and said their good-byes to Devin. We asked for the

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

angels to be with him. It was the hardest thing ever to leave Devin on that mountain in the mine shaft."

Such understanding wasn't unanimous, however. As news reports of the trapped man gained national attention, newspaper readers and others online reacted with a mix of comment that included strong opinion that no one should be abandoned in such a situation.

Corey Schuman, owner of Gold Rush Expeditions, a Salt Lake City-based company that locates and files claims on abandoned mines, questioned the decision to stop while Westenskow was still alive.

"I have no doubt we could have pulled him out without a problem," he said Sunday. "It's really not too dangerous. It's a lack of experience that causes problems. Nobody really trains for this and goes into abandoned mines. I have been down shafts 200 or 300 feet and it's not a problem."

J. Davitt McAteer, who directed the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration in the Clinton administration, said that mine rescues may be subject to such intense second guessing, in part because they are followed closely by the public and media, the and tactics in solving the crisis come down to a judgment call.

"There are no rules for mine rescues. Each situation is different and each mine-rescue decision has to be made by people on the ground," McAteer said. "The decision has to be made on a judgment that they won't put the rescuers at risk, and it's a balancing act that they have to decide."

Since 1869, 151 rescuers have died in 39 mine accidents in the U.S. with 17 of those fatalities occurring in three accidents since 2000, according to statistics compiled by McGee's organization, based in Uniontown, Pa. The most recent involved three rescuers killed by a collapse at Utah's Crandall Canyon coal mine in August 2007, in a grim case that also involved fierce debate over whether additional lives

should have been risked to save the trapped miners.

Of course, such life or death decisions aren't confined to mining accidents. Firefighters and other first responders on the scene of crises face choices on, for example, whether to rescue people in burning buildings.

Steve Frady, a former fire chief in the historic mining town of Virginia City, noted that "people get emotionally tied into these situations, whether they are friends or relatives of victims or onlookers who don't understand the risks simply because they have not been involved in emergency situations ... It's easy to try to second guess what's going on from the outside."

Top officials with the Pershing and Lander county sheriff's departments were closely involved in the rescue effort, and did not offer comment to The Associated Press on details of the rescue effort, including whether one person, or a team, made the final decision to halt the operation. Also assisting on the scene were personnel from Newmont Mining Corp., the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the Nevada departments of public safety and minerals.

Schrempp told The Associated Press that the family was told that rescuers were able to get within about 50 feet of Westenskow before they had to pull back early Friday, due to the hazards.

Westenskow, of Evanston, Wyo., had children ranging in age from 1 to 9, and was divorced but engaged to be married, his family said. He was an avid hunter and snowmobiler who loved the outdoors. He worked at a geothermal drilling operation in Nevada; he was with two friends exploring Wednesday during his off-hours when he fell feet into the open shaft.

"He was a quiet guy. A hard worker," Schrempp said. "He loved to explore the outback of Nevada and Wyoming."

About 50,000 abandoned mine shafts and openings have been identified as the most

hazardous in Nevada, but the shaft where he fell wasn't among them, BLM officials said. Authorities say they plan to permanently seal the shaft with Westenskow's body entombed in it.

"The family feels that if Jesus Christ was buried in a tomb, it's good enough for Devin," his grandmother, Lois Westenskow, said.

Monday 7 March 2011

## Colombia: Gold mine accident leaves 1 dead, 1 missing

*Extract from Colombia reports*

One miner dies from inhaling gas and another is missing after an accident in a gold mine on the boundary of the Caldas and Risaralda departments, central Colombia, El Espectador reports.



Photo: Telemedellin

Intense search and rescue efforts are continuing to try to find the missing man although hopes are low of finding him alive, with some media already reporting his death.

Mining disasters are a common occurrence in Colombia. In an effort to lower the fatalities caused by these accidents, the government announced in February that it will suspend the approval of new mining licenses to ensure safer work conditions are created before mining can begin.

Tuesday 8 March 2011

## WA: Weather, accident affects Argyle Diamonds

*Extract from Perth now*

**RIO Tinto says poor weather conditions are unlikely to have a serious impact on its Argyle Diamond operations, despite road**

## **closures forcing the resource giant to delay shift changes at the mine.**



Argyle Diamond mine & processing plant in WA's Kimberley Region Source: Herald Sun

The company said today it has delayed shift buses and flights to the mine after a contractor received minor injuries after losing control of his car on a damaged piece of road near the Argyle Diamond mine in WA's Kimberley region.

A spokesperson for Argyle Diamonds said following heavy rain on the Argyle Diamond lease overnight, a section of road between the Argyle airport and the mine area has been damaged with severe wash out.

"A vehicle travelling to the airport early this morning lost control in the damaged section of road. The driver has received minor injuries but he is being airlifted to Broome as a precaution," the spokesperson said.



The decline portal leading underground to the Argyle diamond mine near Kununurra (ABC Rural: Argyle Diamonds)

Both the Great Northern Highway and Lissadel Road - have been closed due to the heavy rainfall.

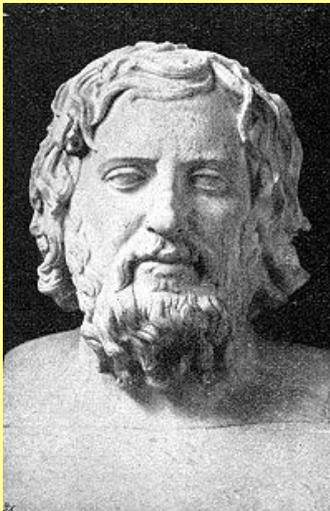
Shift buses that were scheduled to travel to site today from Kununurra, Halls Creek and Wyndham have all been cancelled due to the road conditions.

"We are keeping a watching eye on the weather and the condition of our roads and will make a decision on when to return shift busses and flights to normal," the spokesperson said.

"The site leadership team is currently working with all (staff) on site to ensure safety is the focus."

*PerthNow* understands a skeleton staff is still on site, and the company does not expect the poor weather conditions to cause any significant production losses at the mine.

### Quote of the week



"Fast is fine, but accuracy is everything."

Xenophon  
(Ancient Greek historian, c. 430-354BC)

### NSW: Renewed efforts to re-open mine after fire

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

Mine safety experts from the New South Wales Mine Rescue Service have begun trialling

different materials in an effort to re-open a Hunter Valley mine affected by an underground fire.

Production at Xstrata's \$350-million Blakefield South mine, near Singleton, was stopped two months ago because of the blaze.

Mine Rescue Service General Manager, Paul Healy has been involved in the recovery process, which involves re-introducing oxygen into the colliery.

Mr Healy says several attempts have so far been unsuccessful.

"The recovery has been set back after an initial attempt to reventilate about a week and a half ago," he said.

"At this stage the mine has been re-sealed and we're conducting trials with different sealing materials and we expect that to recommence this week and things should go very well."

Mr Healy says he's confident that critical safety training ensured no one was hurt or injured in the incident.

"We have been involved since day one," he said.

"And prior to day one we were involved in the training of many people in that mine and again I expect that the training was critical to the way that they reacted on the night."

### Tanzania: Three miners trapped underground as flash floods hit mining site

*Extract from IPPmedia.com*

Three people are feared dead after they were trapped underground at Muhuwesi Mining Site in Tunduru District, Ruvuma Region.

Speaking to journalists here yesterday, Ruvuma regional police commander Michael Kamuhanda said the incident occurred on Sunday at a minor goldmine along River Muhuwesi.

The RPC said the miners, who apparently had gone underground to extract gold, got trapped

after a hip of sand washed by flash floods into the mining hole they were working inside.

He said names of the miners feared to be dead in the accident were yet to be known and police in collaboration with local leaders in the district were working around the clock to rescue them.

Muhuwesi Mining Site is famous for gold mining and many people from various areas in the country work there for their livelihoods.

### **Colombia: Mine accident leave 3 dead, 1 trapped**

*Extract from Colombia Reports*

Two mining accidents in the department of Boyaca, northeast of Colombia's capital Bogota, have left three workers dead and one trapped, newspaper El Tiempo reported Tuesday.



The most recent accident took place in a mine near San Mateo as the result of an accumulation of gases. The two workers entered the tunnel early Tuesday morning, before an explosion fatally wounded one and trapped the other.

Though the injured man was taken to a health center, he died minutes after arrival.

Authorities and workers alike await the arrival of rescue workers to aid the 22-year-old who is trapped in the tunnel.

A second accident occurred approximately 24 hours earlier in San Isidro, also outside the Boyaca municipality, killing two men. Authorities are unsure how events occurred, as the mine was supposed to be closed two weeks earlier for operating illegally. Rescue workers managed, late Monday night, to remove the bodies of the two workers.

Seven miners in Boyaca have lost their lives in mining accidents so far this year.

Thursday 10 March 2011

### **Canada: Fatal accident at Hoyle Pond gold mine is second mining death of the year in Timmins**

*Extract from The TimminsTimes, Ontario*

Timmins Police and the Ontario Ministry of Labour are investigating a fatal accident involving a 57-year-old man that occurred at the Goldcorp Hoyle Pond gold mine in Timmins Thursday morning, the Timmins Times has learned.

Police cannot comment except to say the investigation is being carried out on behalf of the Ontario's Chief Coroner's office.

Paramedics were dispatched to the Hoyle Pond Mine just before the noon hour today in response to a 9-1-1 call that a miner suffered a serious injury after being struck by a piece of heavy equipment underground near the 1400 level.

Ontario Ministry of Labour spokesperson Matt Blajer reported that the miner was hit by a scooptram. The man was rushed to Timmins and District Hospital and at some point early Thursday afternoon, he was pronounced dead. The man's identity has not yet been revealed to the media. No other details were available.

This is the second mining fatality in Timmins this year. The first mining death occurred on January 6th at the Xstrata Kidd Mine, when contract miner Richard Roy was killed while working in a raise on the 8200 level.

In both cases, a coroner's inquest will be required since a formal inquest is mandatory when a miner is killed on the job in Ontario.

The last time a miner was killed at the Hoyle Pond Mine was October 12, 2007. That's when mining supervisor Denis Clouthier, 38, died after

he was hit by a piece of loose rock while he was working on an Alimak raise.

## This week in mining accident history (1)

**11 March 1909**

**Howie Muir Colliery**

**Motherwell, Lanark County, Scotland, UK**

**Underground coal mine**

**1 killed, fall of roof**

Source: [www.scotishmining.co.uk](http://www.scotishmining.co.uk)

A machineman, Peter McEwan, 27, was killed underground at the Auchinlea Coal Co Ltd, Howie Muir Colliery on 11 March 1909.

The deceased was driver of an electric coal cutter and had charge of the other machine-men. The accident occurred at a road head which was newly brushed and which deceased had examined while the machine was standing. It had just been set agoing again, when a large stone fell and killed him on the spot. Flat crowns were not in use in the machine wall, but if two had been applied here, the accident would not have occurred.

McEwan, residing at Clelland, was recently married.

Saturday 12 March 2011

## China, US agree to cooperate on mine safety

BEIJING — China, which saw more than 2,400 deaths in colliery accidents last year, on Friday agreed to swap health and safety experiences with the United States in a bid to improve conditions for miners.

The two countries launched a programme that will see Chinese and US experts share best practices on issues such as mine emergency response, ventilation and prevention of the lung disease pneumoconiosis, according to the US embassy.

A Chinese delegation will travel to the United States at the weekend to kick off the programme

with a fact-finding mission on mine safety technology, it said.



[China and the US have agreed to swap health and safety experiences in a bid to improve conditions for miners](#)

"Both of our countries have learned a lot in the past years about the importance of ensuring safe working conditions and health for miners," US Ambassador Jon Huntsman said in a statement.

"These lessons have been hard won, often through tragedy. But more work remains to be done to continue preventing major mining accidents and occupational disease," he said.

"The time has come to work together."

China's mines are known for being among the deadliest in the world because of lax regulation, corruption and inefficiency. Last year, 2,433 people died in coal mine accidents, according to official figures.

But labour rights groups say the actual death toll is likely much higher, partly because of the under-reporting of accidents as mine bosses seek to limit their economic losses.

The government has repeatedly called for better safety standards. In its latest campaign last year, it implemented a policy that requires six kinds of safety systems to be installed in all coal mines within three years.

Premier Wen Jiabao has also ordered mining bosses to work side-by-side with miners in the pits as a way of ensuring that companies more closely observe safety rules.

The United States has a far better track record in mine safety, but fatal accidents still occur.

In April last year, 29 workers were killed when an explosion ripped through a West Virginia mine in the nation's deadliest mining accident in 40 years.

## 19 Killed in SW China Coal Mine Blast

*Extract from CRIENGLISH.COM*

Rescuers have retrieved the bodies of the six missing miners at 11 a.m. Saturday, bringing up the death toll to 19 in the gas blast that hit a colliery in southwest China's Guizhou Province.

A blast ripped through the Xincheng coal mine in Panxian County, Liupanshui City, at 0:30 a.m. Saturday when 34 mine workers were working underground, the county government said in a statement.

Fifteen miners managed to escape, it said.

An investigation into the cause of the explosion is underway.

Sunday 13 March 2011

## USA: Man trapped in water truck at Silver Bell Mine rescued

*Extract from Arizona Daily Star*

A man was trapped inside a water truck for around 90 minutes Sunday morning after it rolled over at Silver Bell Mine in Avra Valley, officials said.

Avra Valley Fire District responded to the accident at the mine, which is northwest of Tucson, at about 9 a.m., Assistant Fire Chief Ray Klein said.

A technical rescue team with Northwest Fire/Rescue District assisted Avra Valley with the rescue, said Capt. Adam Goldberg, a spokesman with Northwest Fire.

The man was airlifted to University Medical Center in critical condition, Klein said.

The man was alert and talking, Klein said.

The Silver Bell Mine is operated by Silver Bell Mining LLC, an ASARCO LLC company.

Monday 14 March 2011

## S. Africa: Worker dies at First Uranium's Ezulwini mine

*Extract from Creamer Media's Mining Weekly*

JOHANNESBURG – JSE- and TSX-listed First Uranium on Monday reported a fall-of-ground related fatality at its Ezulwini gold mine in South Africa.

The accident, which occurred on Saturday, took place on 33-level underground.

The Department of Mineral Resources has issued a temporary work stoppage instruction, while a preliminary investigation is being conducted, the company reported.

The Toronto-based junior earlier this month raised C\$52-million in a share offering to develop its Ezulwini mine and Mine Waste Solutions project.

## QLD: Collapse pushes back the restart of mining at Aditya Birla's Mount Gordon mine

*Extract from perthnow.com.au*

**ADITYA Birla plans to re-open its Mount Gordon underground copper operations in Queensland are back on hold after the collapse of a vent shaft collar at the mine.**

In a statement this morning the company said there were no injuries from the accident, but it has been forced to evacuate workers while an investigation is carried out.

Aditya Birla said it appears the heavy rainfall in the region has undermined the collar, leading to its collapse.

The company was forced to suspend work at the mine in February, due to the impacts of Cyclone Yasi on the region. Aditya had been working since last year to prepare Mount Gordon for a reopening, after it was mothballed in 2009 amid the global financial meltdown.

Aditya Birla had planned to have the mine reopened by mid-April, but that start-date will

now be pushed back again as the company again checks the safety of the mine before operations can begin again.

## This week in mining accident history (2)

**2 March 1910**

**Mexican Mine**

**Treadwell, Alaska**

**Underground metal mine**

**37 killed, explosives exploded**

Source: [www.usmra.com](http://www.usmra.com)

At 11:30 p.m. the powder magazine on the 1,100-foot level of the Mexican mine exploded, killing 37 men and injuring 9. The magazine, containing a day's supply of 20 to 30 boxes, was a chamber cut in the rock and closed in front by boards; it was 25 to 50 feet from the shaft and separated from it by a pillar. Light was furnished by a 16-candlepower lamp a short distance inside the door. There was no wiring over the stored powder.

The explosives had been thawed before delivery, therefore, no heat for thawing was introduced into the mine.

The explosion occurred just as the night shift workmen were waiting to go to the surface to eat. The men on the 990-foot station reported two explosions. The first extinguished their candles, but was of no great violence. As the men relit their candles before proceeding to another shaft, a second explosion of greater violence knocked them over, seriously injuring one and slightly injuring three. Men loading the skips only 45 feet below the 1,100-foot level, were uninjured, as were those on the 1,200-foot and 1,300-foot stations.

The posts on the 1,100-foot station were knocked out and, with the lagging and other timbers, formed a mass of debris that closed the shaft. From the debris, 22 bodies were recovered; 5 injured also were rescued. The doors across the skip compartments were

closed, as ore was being hoisted from the level; one body was found on these doors.

The mancase compartment was open, and eight bodies were recovered from below in this compartment. The light board shed used for a stable was entirely demolished; two bodies were found there; one of the two horses was killed, and the other was injured. This stable was about 100 feet from the shaft, down the main drift. Two bodies were found along the drift, and the fragments of at least one body were found in the magazine itself.

As is usually the case with an explosives accident, the cause could not be determined. As is always frequently the case, no great damage was done to the mine. A rescue party reached the scene within 35 minutes after the explosion, and the cage was in operation in about 11 hours.

The position of the magazine near the shaft, but beyond it, considered in reference to the main drift precluded the possibility of any man being cut off from escape in case of accident, and also aided in the rapid dissipation of the gas; no one was asphyxiated.

Source: *Historical Summary of Mine Disasters in the United States, Volume III*

## Mining dictionary

### A guide to coal mining terminology

#### A

**ANFO**

Ammonium Nitrate mixed with fuel oil for an explosive.



-Ed