



# Mining Accident News No.1111

1 to 8 April 2011

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Friday 1 April 2011

## USA: Senate re-examines mine safety on deadly anniversary

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



Nearing the first anniversary of one of the country's deadliest coal-mine accidents, a Senate panel on Thursday looked back at the tragedy and ahead at future regulatory changes.

Joseph Main, testifying as assistant secretary of the U.S. Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), told senators the scope of the accident – the worst in the U.S. in 40 years – left him with little choice but to recommend Congress approve new, tighter regulatory powers. Final results of MSHA's federal criminal probe won't be released until June 29, at a MSHA facility in Beckley, W. Va.

The Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee was meeting to re-examine the April 5, 2010 accident that killed 29 miners at the Upper Big Branch mine in Raleigh County, W. Va. Top Labor Department officials were there to deliver a progress report on the ongoing federal investigation as well as their recommendations on future legislation.

"Legislation is still needed to fully protect our nation's miners," Main told the committee. "This committee has never subscribed to the myth that mining fatalities are an inevitable aspect of the business. I am asking you to again stand up for

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

miners and pass new and needed mine safety legislation.”

Specifically, Main said his agency needs improvements to the statutory “Pattern of Violations” program for problematic mines; authority for the Labor Department to act more quickly to shut down dangerous mines through injunctions; updated and strengthened criminal penalties under the 1969 Mine Act, and stronger protection for whistleblowers.

Main said federal safety inspectors realized after the Upper Big Branch accident that mine operators were hiding safety violations by tipping off their employees below ground whenever inspectors arrived for a surprise inspection. Inspectors have since responded by seizing control of a mine facility’s phone lines immediately upon arrival, or conducting inspections at surprise times such as evenings and weekends.

Armed with such new tactics, Main said his agency has conducted a fresh wave of inspections in the past year – 228 in all, targeting mines determined to be potentially dangerous. Those inspections have brought more than 4,200 citations and nearly 400 safety violation orders.

But Main also came under close questioning by Sen. Mike Enzi of Wyoming, the committee’s top Republican, for failing to use what authority it had before the Upper Big Branch accident. Enzi noted that the mining industry accounts for about 43,000 high-paying jobs in Wyoming, and argued that MSHA too often wastes inspection resources.

“Why do we send them around to the safest mines on the planet multiple times a year to write citations for unflushed toilets and trash can lids that are ajar?” Enzi said.

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W. Va.), a former governor, was not a committee member but sat in on the meeting and said he was satisfied with what he heard. Manchin noted that his term as

governor coincided with three of his state’s worst-ever mining accidents.

“This has not been forgotten. It will not be forgotten. We want the families to know that we’re doing everything humanly possible,” he said. “We want to make sure we have the technical changes to make it safer.”

Manchin urged Main to work to coordinate mine checks by federal inspectors with those of state inspectors because miners have complained the two levels of inspections are confusing and counterproductive. He also acknowledged that Congress may grant new regulations but should not be over-zealous.

“[MSHA] could have done a much better job of enforcing what laws were on the book. But you’ve got to be careful about throwing more laws on when you’re not even enforcing what you have. That’s the concern I think a lot of people had. And there’s some areas where they don’t have enough enforcement powers that they need.”

## Quarry rockslide kills at least 12 in central Vietnam

*Extract from Thanh Nien News.com*

At least 12 people died and ten others were buried when a quarry collapsed in the central province of Nghe An on Friday morning.



Rescuers search for victims at the site of a landslide in the central province of Nghe An. At least 12 people were killed in the accident Friday morning

Witnesses said the incident occurred at 6 am at the Len Co mining site, roughly 100 kilometers from Vinh town, the provincial capital.

At least 30 employees were working on the site at the time of the accident. Some managed to escape the collapse; the others were buried.

By 3 p.m. rescue workers had recovered and identified a dozen bodies.

The recovery effort remains underway.

Initial reports have it that the Chin Men Ltd. Co. was licensed to operate the quarry, and has leased it to many other companies, according to *VnExpress*.

In December, 2007 a quarry landslide in Nghe An killed 18 workers.

### Quote of the week



"Giving credit where credit is due is a very rewarding habit to form. Its rewards are inestimable."

Loretta Young  
(American actress, 1913-2000)

Monday 4 April 2011

## QLD: More mine traffic sparks fatigue fears

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

Road safety advocates say they are worried fatigue will become a bigger problem on roads in Queensland's Central Highlands, with an increase in traffic volumes between Mackay and Bowen Basin mines.

The constant wet weather means that mining equipment cannot be brought to Mackay to be

repaired and service crews are travelling to mine sites to carry out the work instead.

Graeme Ransley from the Road Accident Action Group says the combination of extra traffic and poor road condition means it is going to take longer for people to travel to and from the Bowen Basin.

"It's going to take much longer now, it may take even take you double because in some places there's going to be stop-go people, where they're working on the road," he said.

"You might be held up 10 to 15 minutes at each section, so you need to allow a lot more time.

"Fatigue is going to come into this and I'm really concerned that people are actually managing their fatigue.

"One of the things that concerns me most, I observed so many people without their headlights on in very dim conditions and raining and I was really surprised that not every single car had their headlights on.

"So I absolutely recommend everybody, even in the city at the moment, you need those lights on for visibility so that you can be seen by other cars."

## WA: BHP says fire at mine quickly controlled

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

BHP Billiton has dismissed union claims there was a dangerous explosion at its Nickel West Mount Keith mine near Leinster earlier today.



The union says workers fled the area after a fire began in a rubber lined tank

The Construction Forestry Mining and Engineering union says a large explosion at the site earlier today could have been caused by welding work being carried out near a gas leak.

BHP says there was no explosion.

The company has released a statement saying a small fire started in a rubber-lined steel tank in the construction area of the site and was extinguished quickly.

BHP says no-one was injured and an investigation is underway.

## **QLD: Mine workers treated for blasting fumes exposure**

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

A central Queensland mine has confirmed more of its workers were taken to hospital because of possible exposure to blasting fumes.

It has been confirmed 24 workers from BMA's Peak Downs mine, north-west of Rockhampton, were taken to hospital on the weekend because of concerns they had inhaled toxic blasting fumes from another mine 10 kilometres away.

A BMA spokeswoman says the workers were outside the exclusion zone and at least 10 kilometres from the blast site.

Last month, the Queensland Mines Inspectorate temporarily banned shot firing at the same two mines after 24 workers raised concerns about exposure to blasting fumes.

A Queensland Government mines inspector says all health and safety procedures were followed at the mine.

The chief inspector of coal mines, Gavin Taylor, says while workers could smell gas, it was not toxic.

"The additional measures that were put in place was that if anyone could smell anything or there was any concern we would have them checked out," he said.

"BMA did that and all of those people are now back at work, so I can say without any fear of

contradiction, there was no harmful gases that came outside the exclusion zone."

## **Weak life signs detected, 60 hours after seven trapped in flooded coal mine in N. China**

*Extract from Xinhua*

TANGSHAN, Hebei, -- Rescuers on Monday detected weak life signs, as they approached a flooded shaft under a coal mine in Tangshan, north China's Hebei Province, where seven workers remained trapped underground for more than 60 hours.

Rescuers said they were only a few meters away from the location where the workers might be trapped by Monday afternoon. However, they had to remain cautious to move further because the digging may cause secondary disasters.

Local authorities said the seven trapped workers were undertaking maintenance work when the flooding occurred at 10 p.m. Friday. Production in the colliery had been halted before the incident to prepare for the mine's reconstruction.

The rescue work is currently led by vice governor of Hebei Zhang Jiehui.

Tuesday 5 April 2011

## **NZ: Inquiry starts into Greymouth mine disaster, which killed 29 people**

*Extract from The Australian, Aus*

**THE families of 29 men, including two Australians, who died in a violent mine explosion in New Zealand have been warned that an inquiry into the disaster would not be picking winners and losers.**

A tearful one-minute silence marked the opening of a royal commission preliminary hearing into the fatal Pike River mine tragedy being held in the South Island town of Greymouth today.

Families of the dead men packed the courthouse for the inquiry, which investigates why methane gas ripped through the coalmine

on November 19, triggering a series of fatal blasts.

The victims included Queenslanders Willie Joynson, 49, and Josh Ufer, 25, two British citizens and one South African. The miners' remains have not yet been recovered.

In his opening statement, commission chairman Judge Graham Panckhurst told the packed gallery that the investigation will leave no stone unturned.

"Of course no one can reverse the tragic events so of November last year," Judge Panckhurst said.

"What we can do however is endeavour to understand what happened at the mine, why it did happen and what can be done to prevent it happening again."

He stressed it was an inquiry, not a court case.

"No one is on trial, there are no sides, no one will win or lose.

"In short, our job is to find out what happened, why and what must change for the future good."

Proceedings would be "fair, open, thorough but also expeditious," the judge said.

Australian Stewart Bell, Queensland Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health, is also a commissioner in the inquiry, one of the most complex ever held in New Zealand.

It involves more than 20 interested parties, including Pike River Coal, Department of Labour, Department of Conservation, unions and the families of the men who were killed.

The preliminary hearing comes ahead of the 15-week inquiry which opens on May 23.

Hearings will examine New Zealand's mine regulations, Pike River Coal's operational and management practices, the cause of the explosions and the search and rescue operation that followed.

New Zealand's mining environment will be compared with Australia and other mining nations, Judge Panckhurst said.

Bernie Monk, spokesman for the families, said today that grieving parents and spouses were eagerly awaiting some clarity on why and how the accident occurred.

"We've been focusing on getting our men out of the mine, something we'd dearly love to see happen soon, but families also want a whole lot of information on how this happened in the first place," Mr Monk said before the hearing.

"They need to go through it with a fine tooth comb so we can finally understand it, get our answers, change our practices and feel assured it won't happen again."

The mine, worth \$NZ6 million (\$4.5m) is in receivership, with receivers PricewaterhouseCoopers hopeful it will be marketed this month and sold by June.

## **All 10 bodies recovered following coal and gas outburst in northwest China coal mine**

*Extract from Xinhua*

URUMQI, -- Rescuers found all 10 bodies following a coal and gas outburst in a coal mine in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Monday, the local coal mine supervisor said.

The first body was discovered at noon on Monday after rescuers worked for 60 hours to rid the shaft of gas and enter the area of the explosion, said an official with the region's coal mine safety supervision bureau.

The last body was found at around 8 p.m., the official said.

The accident occurred at 1:08 p.m. on Saturday at the Aiwei' ergou coal mine of the Xinjiang Coke Group in the regional capital Urumqi trapping 10 workers underground.

The cause of the accident is still under investigation.

## USA: Mine-Blast Probe to Detail Failures

*Extract from online.wsj.com*

### **One Year after Blast, 29 Victims Remembered; Investigator to Cite Firm, Regulator**

One year after a massive explosion killed 29 West Virginia miners, an independent investigator is preparing to release a report detailing failures of company safety systems and regulatory oversight.

Meanwhile, at least 10 wrongful-death lawsuits have been filed against Massey Energy Co., owner of the Upper Big Branch mine, by families of deceased miners. Some claims needed to be filed within a year of the accident under state law. One miner also recently sued for lost wages and other damages, after not being able to return to work.

Massey said it would idle production on Tuesday at its 60 underground mines to honour the deceased miners, and hold a companywide moment of silence at 3:02 p.m., when the explosion ripped through more than two miles of the mine. The worst U.S. coal mining accident in 40 years prompted proposals to revamp federal mine-safety laws, and led to the retirement of Don Blankenship, the longtime CEO of the 97-year-old company.

On Sunday, about 80 miners who had worked at the Upper Big Branch mine gathered together with more than 100 family members for the first time since the accident. Other memorials were planned for Tuesday.

Davitt McAteer, who was appointed by former West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin to conduct an independent investigation, said the explosion was the result of oversight failures both by the company and federal and state safety regulators. Mr. McAteer said he expects to release his report within weeks.

"It is without question that the prevention systems failed, and that includes company

inspections and government inspections," said Mr. McAteer, former head of the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration during the Clinton administration.

He said systems and controls designed to monitor and control combustible coal dust and methane and ensure adequate ventilation "didn't work."

MSHA spokeswoman Amy Louviere said the agency couldn't comment on Mr. McAteer's statements, but is conducting its own internal review.

"MSHA will use any and all lessons learned from these reviews to do its job more effectively," she said. MSHA officials have come under fire from Democratic members of Congress for failing to shut the Massey mine after a spike in safety violations in 2009.

Shane Harvey, Massey's general counsel, disputed Mr. McAteer's conclusions, saying the company's current findings indicate the mine experienced a massive inundation of natural gas "that was unexpected, intense and overwhelmed the normal safety systems."

Massey believes its ventilation plan surpassed federal guidelines and that its procedure for controlling explosive coal dust was sufficient.

Massey Chairman Bobby R. Inman said in an interview Monday that he believes the accident was a "natural disaster" and not caused by any company failings. However, he said, the board reviewed the company's safety performance and found it better than average but "not the best."

Mr. Inman said he "would not be surprised" to see more Massey employees indicted, based on past criminal probes of mining accidents, including a 2006 fire that killed two miners at another Massey mine.

In February, the chief of security at the Upper Big Branch was indicted by the U.S. Attorney in Charleston for obstructing a federal investigation by disposing of documents and making false statements to federal agents. Last month, a

former employee at the mine was charged with two felonies for falsifying a foreman's license and lying to investigators.

Massey said it takes the charges seriously and is cooperating with the U.S. Attorney.

MSHA plans to hold a public hearing on the accident on June 29, to provide an overview of the physical evidence gathered in its investigation, but the agency hasn't set a date to release its final report.

"There's no resolution to it. We're just playing that waiting game," said Clay Mullins, whose brother Rex was killed.

Bobbie Pauley, who worked underground at the mine and whose fiancé Howard "Boone" Payne was killed, organized the private memorial on Sunday, during which miners told stories about co-workers who died and presented families of the deceased miners with burgundy carnations.

Ms. Pauley said she would be at her fiancé's gravesite at 3 p.m. on Tuesday. "I want to be with him a year to the day, to the moment, that he was taken from me," she said.

Massey board member Mr. Inman called the anniversary a "very sad occasion."

"Whether it was a natural disaster, as we believe, or whether it was other causes that could have been prevented, as the leaks (by investigators) would cause you to believe," he said, "you lost those lives, and for the families nothing can replace that."

Wednesday 6 April 2011

## **NZ mine operator wants commission costs covered**

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

Pike River Coal has asked the New Zealand government to pay its costs in assembling evidence for the royal commission into last year's mining disaster.

Receivers for the company say without financial help they will not be able to participate fully in

the inquiry into the deaths of 29 underground workers.

Receiver John Fisk says the company is up for millions of dollars in legal fees to prepare all the evidence needed by the royal commission.

He says Pike River Coal has \$7 million, but says those funds are needed for stabilising work at the mine and to pursue the company's insurance claim.

"At the end of the day, the company is in receivership, we have limited funds," he said.

He says the company will still make its records available, but the commission may have to collate the evidence.

The attorney-general's office says it is yet to consider the company's request for financial help.

## **USA: Agency issues preliminary report in Bull Mountain Mine accident**

*Extract from Billings Gazette, USA*

An investigation into an accident that severed the foot of a Bull Mountain Mine worker last month has been completed.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration has issued a preliminary report on the March 24 accident and citations are still being determined, Amy Louviere, a spokeswoman for the agency, said Tuesday.

The Bull Mountain Mine, an underground coal mine near Roundup, is operated by Signal Peak Energy, whose corporate office is in Ohio. Mike Dawson, a spokesman for Signal Peak, said Tuesday the company had not yet seen the report and could not comment.

The injured miner, Jamison Ward, 28, of Billings, was flown to Billings by helicopter and treated at Billings Clinic. He is no longer on the hospital's census, a spokeswoman said.

Ward, a maintenance foreman, was injured at 6:10 a.m. while he and other miners were attempting to free the longwall face chain

conveyor in the mine. The conveyor is part of the transport system that removes coal mined from the longwall face.

The crew, the MSHA report said, was attempting to jog free the conveyor and had opened an access panel near where Ward was working. Ward's right foot became entangled in the conveyor at the moment the chain moved at least 15 feet, 3 inches. The movement severed Ward's foot above the ankle. He also suffered a compound fracture to his left leg below the knee, the report said. No other injuries were reported.

MSHA's closure order for the equipment, which was issued upon notification of the accident, has been lifted and mining has resumed, Louviere said.

The closure order was imposed to protect people from further injury during the repair job that was under way when the accident happened, she said. A plan to finish the repairs to the conveyor system was developed and carried out.

"When this was done, the order was lifted," she said.

The accident, Louviere said, has no bearing on MSHA's recent decision that it was no longer considering the mine for designation as a persistent violator in a safety review because that possible designation was for a specific time period.

Days before the accident, MSHA had notified the mine that because of corrective steps it had taken, the mine was no longer being considered for the violator designation.

The mine had submitted a plan to reduce the number of "significant and substantial" violations and underwent a complete inspection in addition to regular inspections. MSHA concluded that the mine had met the target for its rate of serious and substantial violations. The inspection period was Jan. 5 to Feb. 26.

MSHA said it would continue monitoring the mine for long-term compliance.

The Bull Mountain Mine was among 13 mines in seven states to get a warning from MSHA in November to show safety improvements or face stricter enforcement.

## **USA: Massey Coal Miners Honor UBB Anniversary with Safety Stand Down**

*Extract from WSAZ.com*

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. -- With the memory of the Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster fresh in mind, Massey Energy employees are using the one-year anniversary to stress the importance of underground safety.

"We're going to honor those members and have a safety stand down," Mammoth Coal President John Jones said.

For a whole day, no actual coal mining was done. Instead, the time down in the mines was used to brush up on standard safety procedure, such as rock dusting and equipment maintenance -- to help prevent disaster from striking again.

"Everybody has a frame of mind to not let that happen here," Mammoth Coal Section Foreman Steve Elswick. "We've got a lot of younger guys coming in to it with not as much experience, so this is more for them to let them know this is serious business."

And it's a dangerous business, at that. Twenty-nine Massey Energy miners died in last year's explosion, so, before the safety lessons began, the Mammoth Coal Mine crew took a moment of silence to remember them.

"The older guys, such as myself, who have floated through the different mines knew one or two or more of them, so it goes through your mind there," Elswick said. "It's like anything -- any accident -- it always seems to be the other person until it affects where you work and who you know."

The devastating accident hits very close to home for the group and reemphasizes the need for extreme caution.



"They need to make sure to take the time to do their jobs right, so they get to go home to their families," Mammoth Coal Superintendent Carl Lucas said.

They're small steps in safety these men hope will keep history from repeating itself.

## USA: Roof Fall in Wyoming County Mine Damages Equipment

*Extract from www.wnstv.com*

**No injuries were reported in Wednesday's accident.**



MULLENS -- A Wyoming County mine is shut down after a roof fall damages equipment.

According to Leslie Fitzwater with the West Virginia Office of Miners Health Safety and Training, the accident happened at about 5 a.m. Wednesday at the Brooks Run Wyoming No. 1 Mine.

Fitzwater says no miners were injured in the accident.

A continuous mining machine and other equipment are buried under rock.

The mine is under a control order, which means its not able to open until the company addresses the problems.

## QLD: Mine blasting fears prompt safety review

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

The Queensland Government's chief inspector of coal mines says a draft of new safety

guidelines for blasting should be released next month.

The safety review was announced after 24 workers from BMA's Peak Downs and Saraji mines, north-west of Rockhampton in central Queensland, were taken to hospital last month because of concern of exposure to blasting fumes.

Last Saturday, another 24 workers from the Peak Downs mine were taken to hospital after raising similar concerns.

Chief inspector Gavin Taylor says the safety review is progressing well.

"As the Minister's announced, there is a sub-committee being chaired by the deputy chief inspector of explosives with a number of industry experts and a CFMEU [Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union] member looking at longer term how we can reduce significantly fume events," he said.

"I believe they had a meeting on Monday of last week face-to-face, they've had a telephone conference in the meantime.

"There'll be another meeting this week and from my information from the safety chief inspector of explosives, it's going fairly well at the present stage.

"I've spoke with the CFMEU rep that was initially on it and he was fairly satisfied that they were heading in the right direction."

Thursday 7 April 2011

## Rwanda: minister cautions on Illegal Mining

*Extract from The New Times, Rwanda*

Muhanga — The Minister of Forestry and Mining has warned residents of Muhanga District against illegal mining activities to avoid accidents.

Christophe Bazivamo, made the call, on Tuesday, while visiting families of victims who lost their lives in a mining accident last week.

Nine people died instantly after a mine caved in at a site in Mpinga cell, Rugendabari sector.

Three others survived with serious injuries and are admitted at Rugendabari Health Centre.

"It is sad that we have lost people in illegal activities, yet such accidents are avoidable," Bazivamo said.

The minister joined residents in paying respect to the deceased, and on behalf of the government, passed on condolences to the families.

The residents requested the government to accredit private mining companies which will guarantee their security and improve mining activities in the area.

## Vietnam: Mining activities to be inspected at PM's request

*Extract from english.vietnamnet.vn*

**VietNamNet Bridge – Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung has asked all local governments to inspect mining activities throughout the country.**



The decision was made after the accident at Len Co quarry in the central province of Nghe that killed 18 workers and injured six.

The PM told local governments to shut down mines that violate labor safety rules.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade will combine with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalid and Social Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and provincial People's Committees to conduct the inspection of all mines that explore minerals for construction material production.

In the south, Binh Duong, Dong Nai and An Giang provinces have many quarries. Some quarries have left deep holes, which are very dangerous.

In related news, Nghe An police have issued a 4-month detention and are seeking indictment against the director of the mining company for responsibilities in the death of 18 workers in a recent rockslide in Len Co Mountain on April 1.

Phan Van Chin, 47, director of Chin Men Limited Company, is facing charges of "violating labor safety, causing serious consequences".

The collapse killed 18 workers, including 11 women, and seriously injured 6 others after they were buried under about 1,000 cubic meters of rock.

Chin Men Co., Ltd. began its rock mining activities at Len Co Mountain in Nam Thanh commune, Yen Thanh district, in 2007. At the time of the quarry collapse, the company had 5 rock mining areas operational at the foot of the mountain.

According to investigators, the quarry collapse might have been caused by technical faults of the company's mining team that weakened the structure of the mine.

## Mine gas leak kills six miners in China

*Extract from UPI*

BEIJING, -- A gas leak in a coal mine in China's southwest Yunnan province killed six miners, authorities said.

The incident occurred Wednesday at a coal mine operated by the Yunnan Dongyuan Luoping Coal Mining Co. in Qujing city, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The cause of the leak was being investigated, the report said. It was not known how many workers were in the mine at the time of the incident.

In another coal mine incident, an explosion Saturday killed 10 miners in northwest Xinjiang Uighur region.

The explosion at the Aiwei Ergou coal mine of the Xinjiang Coke Group in the regional capital of Urumqi trapped the 10 miners who working underground, Xinhua reported.

The bodies of all 10 victims have been recovered but the cause of the explosion has not yet been determined.

Friday 8 April 2011

## Two killed near Freeport's Papuan mine

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

Two people died when a vehicle belonging to US mining giant Freeport McMoRan caught fire in Indonesia's restive Papua province, local police said.

The incident took place a day after unidentified gunmen fired at one of the company's vehicles near its mining concession area, injuring two employees.

"Two people were killed when their car caught fire near Freeport's area," Mimika district deputy police chief Mada Aksanta said.

"We're still identifying the two bodies and the car," he said without giving further details on what triggered the fire.

A police source, who did not want to be named, said the two victims were burnt to death when their car caught fire at 8:00pm (local time), one to two kilometres from the location of Wednesday's shooting.

An Australian mine worker and a local security guard were shot dead in two separate incidents in July 2009 when they were travelling in a car near the company's mining area.

Freeport, which mines gold and copper, is the largest single taxpayer to the Indonesian government.

Pro-independence militants have waged a long-running insurgency against Indonesian rule in Papua, which is off-limits to foreign journalists without special permission.

## This week in mining accident history

**8 April 1911**

**Banner Mine**

**Littleton, Alabama, USA**

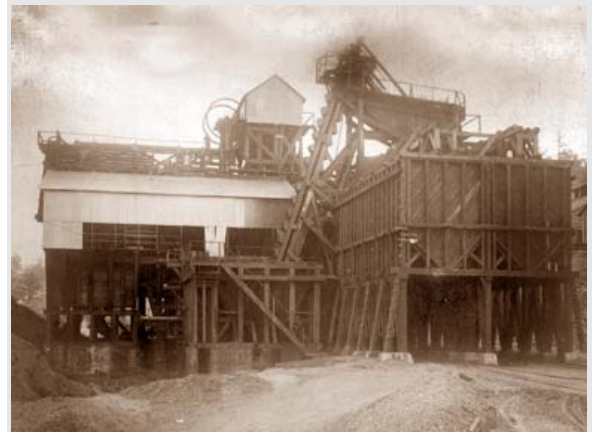
**Underground coal mine**

**128 killed, methane explosion**

Source: [www](#).

### Worst mining disaster in Alabama's history

This disaster was the greatest one in the history of coal mining in Alabama insofar as the loss of life was concerned. At least 128 men lost their lives, of whom about 90 percent were negro convicts.



### Banner Mine

The Banner Coal Mine was a Pratt Consolidated Coal Company operation manned to a large extent by convicts leased to the company by state and county governments. (Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Archives)

The other men in the mine were white convicts, and free negroes who were employed as shot firers and foreman. The machine runners and helpers and the foremen and assistants had not yet entered the mine for work when the explosion occurred, with the exception of O. W. Spradling, an assistant foreman, and Lee Jones, the shot firer, (both free white men), who were in the mine and were killed. They were found on the left haulway.

Banner mine is near the station named Littleton, Jefferson County, about twenty miles northwest

of Birmingham, on the Southern Railway, and the Cane Creek division of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad.



**Workers at Banner Mine**

Workers at Banner Mine were predominantly African American prisoners leased to Pratt Consolidated Coal Company for labor. All but three of the miners killed in the Banner Mine tragedy were convicts. (Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Archives)

The explosion occurred at about 6:20 a.m. Saturday, April 8, 1911 as indicated on the Fan Record. It was customary to allow the convicts to cease work sooner on Saturday than on other days, and accordingly they entered the mine at an earlier hour than usual on this day, or about 6:00 a.m.

Mr. John Cantly, the mine foreman, and Mr. J. T. Massengale, his assistant, were standing near the mouth of the slope when the explosion occurred.

Mr. Massengale reports that he heard a sound resembling a distant shot and at once observed smoke coming out of the mouth of the slope accompanied by a shower of loose gravel. This smoke and gravel appeared about one minute after the sound was heard. On looking toward the No. 2 shaft, he saw a cloud of smoke rising from it also.

Mr. Massengale went down the slope at once, passing several negroes enroute, who were shouting and crying out as they ran up the slope to the entrance of the mine.

He proceeded with a naked light to the scale house near the bottom of No. 1 shaft, where he procured safety lamps. He took these lamps to the outside, cleaned and filled them and then returned with several men, went down the slope and proceeded through the 4th Left above through No. 24 room into the 3rd Left. His party heard three shots after the explosion as they were going inby after obtaining the safety lamps.

He brought 16 or 18 men alive, out of the 3rd Left, whom he found at work as if nothing had happened. These men reported that they felt a disturbance in the air, but did not attach much importance to it. Moreover they were convicts and were under strict discipline and would only leave when ordered.

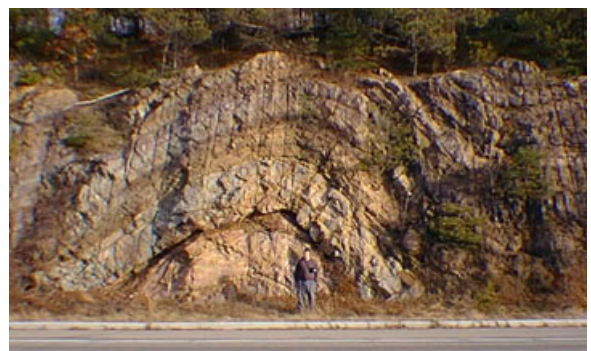
## Mining dictionary

### A guide to coal mining terminology

#### A

**ANTICLINAL AXIS** The ridge of an anticline.

**ANTICLINE** Upwards-arched fold in the rock strata resulting from horizontal pressure. Usually the beds dip outwards in two or more directions from the crest.



Anticline with syncline visible at far right- USGS.

-Ed