



Mining Accident News No.1115

11 to 19 May 2011

In this issue:

SAfrica: Safety steps can lead to less mining deaths	1
Poland: Body of missing mine rescuer found... ..	2
NSW: Hunter leading the world in virtual training for mine rescues	2
Colombia: Gold Mine Accident Kills Miner, Injures Another	3
Qld: Union to join mine death investigation	3
Qld: Veteran miner is fined \$10,000	3
Quote of the week	4
NZ: Victims' families tell authorities to go into Pike River mine	4
USA: Logan mining victim identified	5
Fewer coal mine deaths in China	5
Rwanda: Two Miners Killed in Quarry Mishap ..	5
This week in mining accident history	6
NZ: Former Pike River miners hire lawyers	6
Colombia: Rescue underway to free 8 trapped Cali miners.....	7
UPDATE: 8 trapped Colombian miners rescued alive.....	7
Seven dead in China mine accident	8
USA: Whistleblowing Kentucky Miner Fired, Alleges Discrimination	8
Canada: SAS reaches 1-M hours without lost time accident.....	9
USA: Report faults Massey Energy for West Virginia mine explosion.....	9
Mining dictionary	10

Thursday 12 May 2011

SAfrica: Safety steps can lead to less mining deaths

Extract from Business Live, South Africa

SA's mining fatality rate can still drop below last year's record low of 128 if mining companies and their employees fully comply

with safety policies and procedures, says David Msiza, the chief inspector of mines in the Department of Mineral Resources.

In a telephone interview with BusinessLIVE, he said he was "greatly concerned" by the fact that 2011 had started off badly with mining deaths totalling 50 between January 1 and May 9, 11% more than the 45 deaths reported for the same period last year. Last year, the fatality rate at the country's mines fell by 24% between January 1 and December 31.

On a brighter note, he said there had been a 38% drop in mining injuries during the period, falling to 731 from 1,170 last year.

"I believe that we can still see an improvement on last year's fatality rate if non-compliance with safety procedures and polices is dealt with as a matter of urgency," said Msiza, stressing that his department would not hesitate to shut down mines that did not adhere to safety guidelines.

"We do not have to wait for a serious accident to happen before we take action. We can stop operations at a mine if our inspections show non-compliance or uncover evidence of dangerous activities."

While injury figures up to May 9 show a significant reduction at gold, platinum and coal mines, the fatality picture is not as rosy. Injuries at gold mines fell to 346 from 473 last year, coal mines fell to 67 from 97 and platinum mines fell by the largest amount to 233 from 503.

In terms of deaths, gold mines fell to 23 from 25 and coal mines edged up to five from four. The biggest concern during the period was at platinum mines, where 15 workers died compared with six in the same period last year. Msiza attributed this partly to a higher than usual fatality rate at Lonmin mines, which historically had a low fatality rate.

Commenting more broadly on the higher death rate at platinum mines, he said this was also due

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Issue 15 of 2011

to the lack of experience of new miners in the industry, adding that it was essential for all miners to go through rigorous health and safety training programmes.

With commodity prices hovering around record highs, Msiza said there was a tendency for mining companies to ramp up production, but this had to be done by "balancing production with health and safety".

"The culture of health and safety has to be improved throughout our mining industry. We cannot do it alone and have to work with mining management and labour unions to improve this culture," added Msiza.

"We will play an enforcement role, but with information sharing with mine management, unions and our inspectors. It has to be a continuous process and all-inclusive."

Looking ahead, he said his department was working with the National Qualification Authority and the Mining Qualifications Authority to develop better health and safety skills within the industry.

Earlier this year, Chamber of Mines CEO Bheki Sibiyi said up to 40,000 workers were expected to be trained in on-the-job health and safety inspection skills by 2015.

Meanwhile, the National Union of Mineworkers has become increasingly vocal about safety issues. It held a protest march in Rustenburg on May 7 as a result of the high number of deaths in the platinum industry so far this year.

It said that this was a build-up towards a national day of mourning scheduled for September.

In a statement issued on May 5, Erick Gcilitshana, the NUM's national secretary for health and safety, said: "We are sick, we are tired, in fact we are sick and tired of the attitude of the mining industry when it comes to safety. When it comes to production, they take full responsibility, but when it comes to safety, they argue the responsibility lies with the workers."

Poland: Body of missing mine rescuer found

Extract from thenews.pl

A rescue worker who went missing when rushing to the aid of miners after a methane explosion at the Krupinski mine in Suszec, Silesia, a week ago was found dead this morning.

Radio contact with the 34 year-old man disappeared during the rescue operation last Thursday around 820 metres underground, just hours after what was thought to have been a methane blast.

The search for the man was hampered by difficult conditions in the mine, with smoke, fire and methane still evident after the explosion.

One other rescuer and a miner also died and 11 miners were hospitalised last Thursday.

Investigators are currently looking into whether health and safety standards were being kept to in the mine.

NSW: Hunter leading the world in virtual training for mine rescues

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

World-first virtual reality training developed in the Hunter Valley for helicopter rescues at open-cut mines could be sold internationally.



The Hunter's virtual-reality mines rescue training technology marketed to the world. (ABC Local: Emma Wynne)

The technology brings together the rescue team and the chopper pilot in a virtual simulation of a mine accident, and focuses on improving safety awareness.

The module is based on a scenario at Coal and Allied's Hunter Valley Operations mine site, north-west of Singleton.

New South Wales Mine Rescue Service General Manager, Paul Healy says the technology could change the way mine rescue training is done around the world.

"We've been in regular contact with mines in China and the US, and in Europe," he said.

"We have people in Poland and the Ukraine right now and we have a team going to the States in the next few weeks.

"So, we're actively marketing all of our virtual-reality products."

Friday 13 May 2011

Colombia: Gold Mine Accident Kills Miner, Injures Another

Extract from automatedtrader.net

BOGOTA -(Dow Jones)- One gold miner was killed and another injured in a cave-in at an illegal underground mine in central Colombia, the government's mining oversight institute Ingeominas said in a statement.

The accident occurred Thursday afternoon near the town of Remedios in the state of Antioquia, Ingeominas said. It didn't say what caused the mine to collapse but said rain-loosened earth due to torrential downpours over the past year have made underground mines throughout Colombia "very vulnerable" to accidents.

Tens of thousands of gold mines dot the Colombian countryside, most of them illegal mines spawned by high unemployment and gold's current record price of more than \$1,500 a troy ounce.

Thursday's death brings to at least 34 the number of miners killed in Colombia this year. Most of the deaths have occurred in underground coal mines due to methane gas explosions.

Qld: Union to join mine death investigation

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Investigations are continuing into the death of a mine worker in central Queensland.

Emergency crews were called to Rio Tinto's Clermont mine, north-west of Rockhampton, yesterday afternoon.

A company spokesman says a man had gone into cardiac arrest and had no obvious signs of injury.

Tim Whyte from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union says he will be involved in the investigation.

"An individual was found next to an excavator and the reasons for his demise are unknown at this stage - there's no reason to believe that he was actually crushed by it," he said.

Production at the mine is expected to resume today.

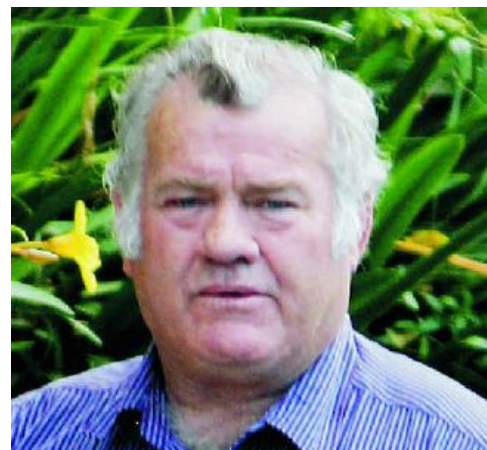
Rio Tinto Coal says it is providing support to the man's family.

Saturday 14 May 2011

Qld: Veteran miner is fined \$10,000

Extract from Daily Mercury, Mackay, Qld

A VETERAN miner was yesterday fined \$10,000 after he accidentally ran over a co-worker in the underground Bundoora Mine, near Middlemount.



Adrian Morrissey was fined \$10,000.

Adrian Morrissey had 40 years experience in the mining industry but lost his career when he was operating a 32-tonne shuttle car, on November 8, 2009, and ran over 51-year-old Ian Girle who suffered horrific injuries.

At the time, Morrissey, 61, was working at the Anglo Coal-owned mine as an explosive risk zone controller and was a contractor with Mastermyne.

Last month in the Industrial Magistrates Court in Mackay, Morrissey pleaded guilty to failing in his workplace, health and safety obligations by causing grievous bodily harm.

The court heard that Morrissey was operating a shuttle car when Mr Girle approached him on foot and verbally asked him to move the shuttle car backwards.

Mr Girle then walked to the back of the shuttle car and remained within a metre of the side of it. Morrissey expected Mr Girle to walk forwards and not to walk to the back and he drove backwards and ran over him. Mr Girle suffered compound fractures of his left leg and fractures to both sides of his pelvis.

His injuries left him in the Rockhampton Base Hospital for a month and he faces further surgery and is restricted to administrative duties.

Yesterday, the court heard Morrissey had suffered great financial hardship since the incident which would restrict his opportunities in the industry in the future.

The court also heard it took 292 hours and \$75,000 to investigate the incident. Magistrate Damien Dwyer said he couldn't accept that as a reasonable cost for such an investigation and rejected a claim for Morrissey to pay a portion of the investigation costs.

Mr Dwyer said Morrissey's actions were reckless and he should have been looking out for his co-worker when reversing.

"I accept it was a once off. He had an excellent work history and no blemishes on his record," he said.

Quote of the week



"Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they're supposed to help you discover who you are."

Bernice Johnson Reagon
(USA singer, composer, scholar, 1942-)

NZ: Victims' families tell authorities to go into Pike River mine

Extract from www.stuff.nz

The families of the Pike River mining victims on the South Island's West Coast are urging authorities to go into the mine and get the bodies.

Blurry footage of what was believed to be a second body was shown to the families earlier this week.

All 29 bodies of the miners and contractors killed in the November 19 blast remain in the mine, with police saying it is still too dangerous to attempt a recovery.

Video images have shown what appears to be two bodies. The latest was near a ventilation shaft and close to an open fire fighting box, in a different area to where the first body was seen.

Family spokesman Bernie Monk said the images of the second body were not as clear as the footage of the first body but showed an outline of a body "covered with coal dust".

The lawyer for the families said the image reinforced the need to enter the coal mine.

Colin Smith told Radio New Zealand there was substantial evidence to be gained from entering the mine.

Without doing so, conclusive knowledge about what occurred could not be gathered for the

Royal Commission of Inquiry into the tragedy, he said.

The families believed images of an apparently open fire fighting box suggested some of the men may have survived the first blast.

Mr Monk said the latest images made the families "more determined" to put pressure on the mine's receivers to go into the mine and 'have a look'.

"We are going to fight every inch of our life to get these guys out again."

Police said yesterday the mine was still too dangerous to enter.

Assistant Commissioner Grant Nicholls said the video image was of poor quality and it was impossible to determine if it was a body.

It would take two to three months to enhance the latest images from inside the mine, he said.

Sunday 15 May 2011

USA: Logan mining victim identified

Extract from the Charleston Gazette, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The coal miner who died Saturday while working at a surface mine owned by a Patriot Coal subsidiary in Logan County was identified Sunday.

Richard L. Young, 37, died at 8:18 p.m. after being hit by a piece of equipment at the Guyan Surface Mine, according to state Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training spokeswoman Leslie Fitzwater.

The U.S. Mining Safety and Health Administration released information stating Young was crushed when he was pinned beneath a counterweight at the rear of a 992G loader. An inspector was dispatched to the mine and an investigation will be conducted, MSHA said.

The Guyan Surface Mine near Yolyn is operated by Apogee Coal, a Patriot Coal subsidiary.

The death is the fourth coal-mining death in the United States this year, and the second in West Virginia.

Fewer coal mine deaths in China

Extract from Xinhua

A sharp decline in coal mining deaths was reported in China for the first four months this year, following the government's efforts to improve safety in the industry.

The mortality rate fell 39 percent from the same period last year, according to an ongoing international forum about mining safety held in Hefei, capital of east China's Anhui Province.

China's coal mines are among the deadliest in the world.

The booming coal-dependent economy, lax regulations and inefficiency are usually blamed for the high death rate.

The government has called for better safety systems and forced smaller, more dangerous mines to close in the hope of reducing accidents.

The death toll dropped to 2,433 in 2010 from 5,938 in 2005, while the country's annual coal production jumped to 3.24 billion tonnes from 2.15 billion tonnes over the same period, said Zhao Tiechui, deputy head of the State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS), during the forum.

At the forum, held Saturday to Monday, Zhao vowed that China would adopt and enforce stricter safety standards, supervision and punishments, to curb mine accidents.

Monday 16 May 2011

Rwanda: Two Miners Killed in Quarry Mishap

Extract from allafrika.com

Karongi — Officials in Twumba Sector warned local miners to observe requisite protective measures after quarry buckled claiming two miners lives.

"It's unfortunate that the accident occurred and this should be a lesson to us all to prevent more deaths in the future," Nicolas Karasanyi, the sector Executive Secretary, said.

The death of the miners, 28 year old Aminadab Mbakuriyemo, and 51 year old Boniface Nyirinkindi, comes hardly a week after a mudslide claimed an entire family in Nyabihu District.

The two were mining Cassiterite, a tin oxide mineral.

Hundreds of relatives and friends turned up to comfort the bereaved families during a funeral service over the weekend.

It is alleged that the two miners were not permitted to work in the quarry owned by Bay View Group; a US investment firm mining in the area.

Bill Quam, the company's country manager told The New Times yesterday that efforts are underway to avoid such accidents.

"We are closely working with local authorities to ensure that miners do not die when it can be prevented," Quam said.

He disclosed intentions to renew his company's contract with the government when it runs out before the end of the year.

This week in mining accident history

17 May 1925

Dortsfeld Mine

Dortsfeld, near Dortmund, Germany

Underground coal mine

43 killed, blasting material explosion

Source: www.thehistorypeople.com & trove.nla.gov.au

A major mine disaster in Dortsfeld in Germany has now claimed the lives of 43 men, rescue attempts are still continuing but are hampered by the deadly gasses in the mines with rescue workers collapsing from the fumes in the narrow passageways.

German Colliery Disaster

41 Men Killed

Berlin, May 18 (Rueter) - The total number of casualties at the Dortsfeld mine, near Dortmund, is as follows – Killed, 41; injured, 27. All the bodies have now been recovered and the mine is now clear.

Five hundred men were employed at the mine. The explosion was due to the blowing up of a store of explosives in one of the pits.

The Argus (Melbourne, Vic; Tuesday 19 May 1925)

Tuesday 17 May 2011

NZ: Former Pike River miners hire lawyers

Extract from www.stuff.nz

Former managers at the Pike River coal mine have hired top defence lawyers, as it is revealed all parties involved in the disaster will meet to discuss recovering the victims' bodies.

The managers say they believe the company will try to blame them for the disaster, where 29 men died in a series of explosions beginning November 19.

Royal Commission hearings on the tragedy are scheduled to begin in July. Police and the Department of Labour continued to investigate.

George Colligan, who worked as a contractor and trained staff at the mine for almost a year, has hired criminal lawyer Greg King to represent him and four colleagues, RNZ reported.

Colligan said he had done nothing wrong but believed the company's lawyers would seek to put the blame for what happened on him.

The mine's former safety and training manager, Neville Rockhouse, had also hired a lawyer, RNZ reported.

Rockhouse's youngest son, Ben, died in the mine. His other son, Daniel, was one of only two men to make it out alive.

He said he had hired a defence lawyer because he expected to have his reputation tarnished in his quest for the truth.

Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn said there had been a lot of rumour floating about since the accident, and those involved with the mine were feeling vulnerable.

"This is a serious inquiry coming up. People are making sure they cover their backs," he said.

RECOVERING BODIES

Meanwhile, parties involved in the disaster will meet later this month to discuss the logistics of recovering the mine victims.

All 29 bodies of the miners and contractors killed in the blast remain in the mine, with police saying it is still too dangerous to attempt a recovery.

Video images have shown what appears to be two bodies. The latest was near a ventilation shaft and close to an open fire-fighting box, in a different area to where the first body was seen.

Pike River Coal receiver John Fisk said yesterday a meeting would be held on May 23 in Christchurch.

The receivers, Mines Rescue staff, representatives of the victims' families, police and technical experts would attend the private meeting, he said.

"The meeting has been requested by the families. It's an opportunity for Mines Rescue to explain to the families the processes and issues we have with re-entry."

Fisk said Mines Rescue would explain the logistics of safely entering the mine.

Nicholas Davidson, legal counsel for the Pike River families committee, said it would be a "major meeting" of all parties involved in the mine re-entry.

The location of the meeting would not be publicly disclosed, he said.

Colombia: Rescue underway to free 8 trapped Cali miners

Extract from Colombia Reports

The rescue is underway to free eight miners trapped since Tuesday morning after a shaft collapsed inside a Cali coal mine.



Relatives of the eight miners trapped by a cave-in wait for them to be rescued at the Loma Gorda coal mine in the rural area of Cali May 17, 2011. REUTERS/Jaime Saldarriaga

The Red Cross, the Civil Defense, police and firefighters are taking part in the rescue to free the workers stuck 164ft inside the Loma Gorda mine in Los Limones. The mine is located in the village of Montebello on the outskirts of Cali, the capital of Valle del Cauca department.

The cause of the collapse is still unknown but it is not being ruled out that it was caused by an accumulation of gases after a previous explosion, according to El Espectador.

Mayor of Cali Jorge Ivan Ospina said that the mine is legal and added that "The rescuers are removing rubble, propping up the mine shaft and fortunately the miners have a supply of oxygen. We know this because they have shouted to us."

UPDATE: 8 trapped Colombian miners rescued alive

Extract from Santa Cruz Sentinel

BOGOTA, Colombia—Emergency crews on Tuesday rescued eight miners who had spent six hours trapped in a caved-in coal mine in southeastern Colombia, a Red Cross official said.

All the miners are alive and in good condition, Alfonso Vargas, head of the Red Cross in the nearby city of Cali, told The Associated Press by telephone.



A miner walks out after being rescued from the Loma Gorda coal mine. Eight miners were trapped for more than seven hours after a cave-in at the mine and were rescued unharmed. REUTERS/Jaime Saldarriaga

Vargas said the cause of the accident remains unknown, but strong rains have fallen on the region and could have contributed to the collapse.

About 50 rescuers were working at the Loma Gorda mine when the collapse took place early Tuesday.

Authorities said the Loma Gorda had been in operation for 30 years and was legal.

Seven dead in China mine accident

BEIJING - SEVEN people have been killed in a gas accident in a coal mine in south-west China, state media said on Wednesday - the latest fatal incident to strike the nation's notoriously dangerous collieries.

The accident took place late on Tuesday in Weixin county in Yunnan province, the official Xinhua news agency quoted a county government spokesman as saying.

Thirteen miners managed to escape, the spokesman said, adding that all workers had been accounted for.

The mine's managers have been taken into police custody, and an investigation into the cause of the accident was ongoing, the report said.

Last year, 2,433 people died in coal mine accidents in China, according to official statistics, or a rate of more than six workers per day.

Labour rights groups, however, say the actual death toll is likely much higher than official data

indicate, partly due to under-reporting of accidents as mine bosses seek to limit their economic losses and avoid punishment.

Wednesday 18 May 2011

USA: Whistleblowing Kentucky Miner Fired, Alleges Discrimination

Extract from www.huffingtonpost.com

WASHINGTON -- A Kentucky miner whose whistleblower case recently caught the attention of mine safety proponents on Capitol Hill was fired yesterday, his lawyer said.

According to attorney Tony Opegard, Charles Scott Howard lost his job at the Cumberland River Coal Company after a doctor employed by the mining company determined he could no longer work underground. The firing came just days after an executive at Cumberland River's parent company Arch Coal was accused by House Democrats of giving "contradictory" testimony regarding alleged whistleblower retaliation against Howard.

The well-known mine safety gadfly has now filed a discrimination complaint and asked that the Mine Safety and Health Administration investigate. Over the years, Howard has lodged several safety complaints against his employers. He even shot video of apparently dangerous conditions at the mine where he worked once and aired it at a public MSHA meeting -- an action which allegedly led to previous retaliation from Cumberland River.

During a May 4 mine safety hearing on Capitol Hill, Arch Coal executive Anthony Bumbico was asked about this alleged punishment against Howard for taking his safety concerns public. Bumbico testified that the miner had chosen to go public rather than bring the problems to the attention of Cumberland River Coal management. In fact, Howard had repeatedly noted the problems in company log books, as detailed by the trade publication *Mine Safety and Health News*.

In a letter sent last Friday to Reps. Tim Walberg (R-Mich.), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, George Miller (D-Calif.) and Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.) said that Bumbico needs to clarify his "questionable" statements regarding Howard's case. Earlier this week, a spokesperson for Arch Coal told HuffPost, "should we receive a letter seeking clarification [from Congress], we will respond accordingly."

According to Opegaard, Cumberland River Coal recently offered Howard a "substantial amount of money if he would agree to permanently resign his position with the company and agree not to reapply." He declined to do so.

As for the timing of Howard's firing, Opegaard said it will be up to an administrative judge to decide whether it was coincidental. "I think it's well known that Cumberland River doesn't want Scott at its mines," he said.

More than a year after the tragedy at Upper Big Branch Mine, in which 29 West Virginia miners died, Congress has not managed to pass a major safety reform bill. The Robert C. Byrd Mine Safety Protection Act failed in the House last year under Republican opposition but has since been reintroduced. Among other changes, the law would bring more scrutiny to mines with "patterns of violations," increase the criminal penalties against unsafe mines and enhance protections for mine whistleblowers like Howard.

Testifying at the May 4 hearing as a guest of Republicans, Bumbico argued that MSHA already has the regulatory tools it needs to ensure safe workplaces. Rather than take on more oversight, he said, MSHA should adopt a "voluntary" safety compliance program for mining companies.

Canada: SAS reaches 1-M hours without lost time accident

Extract from Canadian Mining Journal

ONTARIO - St Andrew Goldfields (SAS) of Toronto has reached a major safety milestone. Its employees at the East Timmins operations have worked 1.0 million personhours without a lost time accident.

Duncan Middlemiss, VP of East Timmins operations for SAS, said, "This formidable achievement is due to the entire SAS team who remain committed to operating in a safe way."

SAS operates the Holloway and Hislop gold mines and the Holt mill a few kilometres east of Timmins. The company is also redeveloping the Holt gold mine for production this spring.

Thursday 19 May 2011

USA: Report faults Massey Energy for West Virginia mine explosion

Extract from The Washington Post, USA

An investigative report that details the findings of a year-long probe into the Upper Big Branch mine explosion paints a picture of a rogue coal operation where basic safety measures were routinely flouted and federal regulators did little more than issue citations and walk away.

The 122-page report to West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin (D), written by a panel of independent safety experts, includes interviews with dozens of miners, an examination of the disaster site and a review of thousands of pages of internal and public documents.



The main entrance to the Upper Big Branch Mine where 29 miners were killed on April 5, 2010.

The panel concluded that the disaster that killed 29 miners was "man-made" and could have been prevented.

The investigation was led by former Mine Safety and Health Administration director J. Davitt McAteer and recommended more than 52 safety

reforms. Many of them call for an increased and mandated use of technology to measure, gauge and record safety conditions to reduce human error and short circuit fraudulent behaviour.

“We are long past the time where we can accept the loss of 29 miners. If we are going to have a mining industry, we have to reform ourselves,” McAteer said at a Thursday press briefing.

McAteer and his team placed much of the blame for the worst U.S. mining disaster in 40 years on his former agency.

“Despite MSHA’s considerable authority and resources, its collective knowledge and experience, the disaster at the Upper Big Branch mine is proof positive that the agency failed its duty as the watchdog for coal miners,” the report said.

One unidentified longtime MSHA official told McAteer’s group that managers for Massey Energy, the mine’s owner, fought safety citations so vociferously, it began to shape how federal inspectors viewed their mines and softened their enforcement approach. “Massey trains our inspectors better than we do,” the MSHA official is quoted as telling the investigators.

In response to the findings, MSHA Director Joseph A. Main emphasized that his agency has stepped up enforcement since the disaster but agreed with most of the conclusions. He asked Congress to help with some of the recommended reforms that would require new safety legislation.

“We are playing a significant role in making mines safer. Yet, there are mine operators that don’t get it,” Main said. “They operate differently when MSHA is not there, and they know MSHA cannot be there all the time. That’s why we have called on Congress to provide us with more tools to protect miners. We need to make sure that recalcitrant operators do get it.”

The agency’s own investigation into the disaster is ongoing.

In a prepared statement, Massey General Counsel Shane Harvey disagreed with the

report’s assertion that the methane monitors, which measure the concentration of the combustible gas in a mine, were not functioning at Upper Big Branch. Harvey also disagreed with the report’s conclusion that the explosion was fuelled by highly combustible coal dust.

“We disagree with Davitt’s conclusion that this was an explosion fuelled by coal dust,” the statement said. “Again, we believe that the explosion was caused by a massive inundation of methane-rich natural gas. Our experts feel confident that coal dust did not play an important role.”

Although the report was critical of MSHA, the harshest criticism was directed at Massey Energy. The safety experts said the company has created a work culture that encourages “deviant” behaviour that includes falsifying safety reports.

“The April 5, 2010 explosion was not something that happened out of the blue, an event that could not have been anticipated or prevented,” the report said in its conclusion. “It was, to the contrary, a completely predictable result for a company that ignored basic safety standards and put too much faith in its own mythology.”

<http://www.usmra.com/download/UpperBigBranchReport.pdf>

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

A

ARCH

A steel support of two or three sections which, when bolted together, form a strong permanent support.



-Ed