



# Mining Accident News No.1121

11 to 22 July 2011

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Monday 11 July 2011

## NZ begins probe into deadly coal mine explosion

*Extract from Associated Press*

WELLINGTON, New Zealand - Families of the 29 workers who died in a New Zealand coal mine explosion last year are hoping for answers as an official inquiry into the disaster began hearing testimony Monday.

The public probe comes just two weeks after crews re-entered the mine for the first time since the accident to try to recover the bodies. That operation could take months as crews inch their way down the mine, setting up air seals and extracting dangerous gasses as they go.

A three-person commission began hearing testimony from mine and energy experts in the South Island town of Greymouth, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) southwest of the Pike River mine where the workers died in methane-fueled explosions last November.

The panel aims to find out what caused the explosions, as well as unearth any problems with safety procedures and rescue operations. The panel could recommend changes to New Zealand's mining industry.

Commission lawyer James Wilding said there were questions about whether Pike River Coal Ltd was under financial pressure, and, if so, whether that weakened health and safety standards in the mine.

Bernie Monk, whose son Michael died in the tragedy, told the Associated Press this week that the families want to find out the truth about what went wrong and to make sure it never happens again.

He said he's glad the families will also get a chance to testify.

**NOTE:** Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of the NSW Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services  
Issue 21 of 2011

"We wanted to be heard," Monk said. "A lot of us are from mining backgrounds. We are not fools to be swept under the carpet."

He said New Zealand has not learned from previous mining disasters and has taken the wrong approach in recent years by loosening mining regulations.

"To be honest, we are nearly back to a Third World situation with mining here," he said. "This is not what New Zealanders want or expect."

The inquiry will be divided into four stages and could take up to eight more months to complete. Background fact-finding began earlier this year.

Twelve witnesses are scheduled to give testimony during the inquiry's first phase.

A January inquest concluded that all 29 missing miners must have died within minutes of the first explosion last November. Two other miners managed to escape after the initial blast.

There have been a total of 210 deaths in New Zealand mines over the past 115 years. The last large deadly explosion before Pike River took place at the nearby Strongman mine in 1967, when 19 people died.

## NSW: Hunter contractor fined for mine accident

*Extract from Australian Mining*

A Newcastle contract company has been fined \$55 000 after a miner's leg was crushed by plant equipment.

The 52 year old contractor from UGM Engineering was injured at Xstrata's Beltana No. 1 underground coal mine on 21 August, 2008, according to The Herald.

The victim and fellow miners were moving plant approximately nine metres long, 2.15 metres wide and weighing around 4.7 tonnes when the victim's right leg was caught and crushed by the equipment.

Contractor UGM was fined \$55 000 after it pleaded guilty to not ensuring the health and safety of the victim.

Justice Francis Marks said the incident was due to UGM not properly instructing their workers on how to couple the equipment together and not supervising its workers.

## Three die in China coal mine rescue

*Extract from www.xin.msn.com*

Three rescuers died as they tried to help workers trapped in a colliery in eastern China, local authorities said Monday, as 21 people remained stuck in another mine in the same region.

China has been hit by a spate of serious mining accidents recently, highlighting the dangerous nature of the industry.

The three rescue workers were trying to reach miners trapped in a colliery in Shandong province's Zaozhuang city after a fire broke out underground on Wednesday evening, according to the local government.

One of the rescuers collapsed underground due to the extreme heat, then two other relief workers tried to save him but they too fell and lost consciousness, it said in a statement.



Three die in China coal mine rescue

Other rescuers came up behind them and carried them to the surface, but the three had died, it added.

The local government did not say how many miners were still stuck underground, but according to the last official tally on Friday, 28 people were trapped.

The news comes as 21 workers remain trapped underground in another mine in Shandong, after water flooded an iron ore pit in Weifang city on Sunday, local authorities said.

Elsewhere in the country, a coal mine in southwest China's Guizhou province flooded more than a week ago, leaving workers trapped.

But in a rare piece of good news, two workers were rescued on Sunday after being trapped for more than a week underground in a mine collapse in the southern region of Guangxi.

So far, eight people have died and 12 are still missing in the accident, the official Xinhua news agency said earlier.

China's coal mines have a notoriously poor safety record, which the government has repeatedly pledged to address.

In 2010, 2,433 people died in coal mine accidents in China, according to official statistics -- a rate of more than six workers per day.

Labour rights groups, however, say the actual death toll is likely much higher, partly due to under-reporting of accidents as mine bosses seek to limit their economic losses and avoid punishment.

Tuesday 12 July 2011

## **China: Fourth mine disaster in July traps 24 workers**

*Extract from ChinaDaily.com.cn*

BEIJING - The flooding of an iron ore mine in East China trapped 24 miners underground late Sunday.

It was the most recent disaster in a spate of mine accidents that have occurred in the country this month, local authorities said on Monday.

By Monday afternoon, 24 miners remained unaccounted for as rescuers struggled to ascertain their whereabouts underground and install pipes to pump water out of the flooded mine in Weifang, a city in East China's Shandong province.

Floodwaters began to gush into the shaft at about 11 pm on Sunday from a nearby pit, which had collected more than 20,000 cubic meters of water, or enough for 10 Olympic swimming pools, reported Xinhua News Agency.

The pit was filled after rain had fallen frequently on places around the mine in the past few days, the man said. The pit later collapsed, leaking its contents into the mine shaft.



Rescuers on Monday send pipes into a flooded iron ore mine where 24 miners are trapped in Weifang city's Fangzi district, in Shandong province. The accident occurred at about 11 pm on Sunday after rain had fallen for several days. Zhu Zheng / Xinhua

Thirty-one miners were working in the shaft when the accident occurred. Seven of them escaped; the rest were trapped underground.

Local authorities said they sent more than 300 rescuers to the site and installed two pumps to lower the water level in the shaft.

Hindering their work, though, was sludge brought into the shaft by the floodwaters. The sludge mixed with the water in the shaft and interfered with the operation of the pumps.

Despite the shaft's narrowness, the rescue workers continued to put in place more pumps and pipes, according to officials at the rescue operation's headquarters.

That additional equipment enabled them to pump water at a rate of 180 cubic meters an hour.

Other rescuers stood by ready to descend into the mine once the water level was low enough to give them safe entry.

The mine belongs to the Zhengdong Mining Company.

The disaster there on Sunday was the fourth large mine accident to occur in China in the past 10 days.

In Shandong province's Zaozhuang city, 28 coal miners were trapped on Wednesday after a fire had broken out in the mine shaft they had been working in.

In South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, rescuers continue to search for 12 workers who have been stranded in a collapsed coal mine since July 2.

Meanwhile, rescue work is under way in Guizhou province, where an underground flood trapped 23 workers at a coal mine the same day.

## USA: Man Dies in Martin County Mining Accident

*Extract from [www.wsaz.com](http://www.wsaz.com)*

**The accident happened at the Alpha Natural Resources' Voyager Mine - No. 7, which is along the Martin/Floyd County line.**

MARTIN COUNTY, Ky. (WSAZ) -- A man is dead after an accident at a mine in eastern Kentucky.

Martin County Coroner Joe Mullens tells WSAZ.com the man worked at Alpha Natural Resources' Voyager Mine - No. 7, which is along the Martin/Floyd County line.

Mullens says it happened at about 7:00 p.m. Monday when the miner was working underground on a piece of equipment.

He was pronounced dead at the scene.

**UPDATE:** MARTIN COUNTY, Ky. (WSAZ) -- The Martin County Coroner has released the name of the man killed in an accident at a mine in eastern Kentucky Monday night.

Coroner Joe Mullens tells WSAZ.com that Ryan K. Thatcher, 26, of Magoffin County, died in the

accident at the Alpha Natural Resources' Voyager Mine - No. 7.

Motorman Ryan Thatcher, 26 years old, suffered a fatal injury Monday while hauling supplies through the Voyager No. 7 coal mine on a rail locomotive, Alpha said. A preliminary review of the accident suggests Thatcher was hurt by an overcast beam on the mine's roof, though there were no eyewitnesses at the scene to corroborate the finding.

Mr Thatcher was unresponsive when found and co workers immediately administered CPR at the scene, subsequently removing the victim to a waiting ambulance.

Thatcher had worked at the mine near Inez, Ky., for about two and a half years and had more than six years of total mining experience.

"This is a sad moment and our hearts go out to Mr. Thatcher's family and friends," Alpha regional president Allen Dupree said. "We are working diligently with state and federal agencies to confirm the circumstances surrounding the accident."

The Voyager No.7 mine is a two section underground mine that opened in 2008. The mine is operated by Martin County Coal Corporation. Martin County Coal is a former operation of Massey Energy Co and was acquired along with other Massey Energy mining operations by Alpha Natural Resources in June 2011.

## South Africa: Fatality at Harmony's Tshepong mine

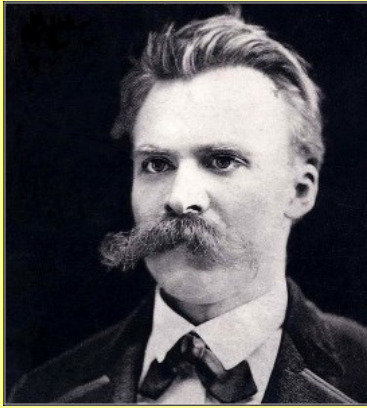
Harmony Gold Mining Company Limited (Harmony) regrets to advise that a fall of ground accident occurred at its Tshepong mine in the Free State this morning, which resulted in the death of an employee.

The mine has been closed until such time as all investigations into the accident have been completed.



Harmony's Chief Executive, Graham Briggs and his management team, express their sincere condolences to the family of the deceased and those affected by the incident.

### Quote of the week



"That which does not kill us makes us stronger."

Friedrich Nietzsche  
(German philosopher 1844-1900)

Wednesday 13 July 2011

## Zambia: KCM mine accident claims one

*Extract from Times of Zambia*

A MINER at Konkola Copper Mines (KCM) has died in an underground mine accident, the mining company has announced.

According to a statement released by the company yesterday, Nelson Kalima, who was aged 27, and was working for a contractor company engaged at the Nchanga underground mine, died in an incident during secondary blasting.

Investigations were launched to ascertain the cause of the accident and to reinforce measures for preventing similar incidents in future.

"Konkola Copper Mines (KCM) regrets to announce a fatality involving Nelson Kalima at the Nchanga underground mine in Chingola on Monday afternoon.

"KCM extends its condolences to the family of the deceased during this difficult moment," the statement reads.

## One dead in accident at Czech NWR Karvina mine

*Extract from Reuters Africa*

PRAGUE, - One miner was killed and another injured at the Karvina coal mine owned by Czech mining firm New World Resources (NWR), the company said.

The London-listed company said it was not clear whether the accident, which happened on Tuesday, would affect production.

"It's not a usual accident. It was a tremor, a geological event," NWR investor relations officer Tomas Pisa said.

Ladislav Sobol, a spokesman for mine operator OKD, said the accident happened at the CSA site of the Karvina mine.

He was not able to say whether it would halt production but added that if that were to happen, it would only affect that one site at the mine.

Karvina, which also includes the Lazy site, produces more than 4 million tonnes of coal a year.

NWR said it was investigating the accident along with Czech regional mining authorities.

## NZ: Pike River mining approach inadequate: geologists

*Extract from Australian Mining*

Geologists have labelled Pike River Coal's approach to mine geology inadequate, on the third day of the Royal Commission inquiry.



Jane Newman, a geologist from Newman Research Energy, told the Commission the miner's geological database was 'sketchy', according to The Press.

Continuing from her testimony yesterday, where she told the panel she been contracted by Pike River Coal (PRC) to co-ordinate a study into acid mine drainage risks.

According to Newman, in 2006 a former student of hers who was employed by PRC raised concerns about 'complexities' appearing at the mine.

Newman recommended investigation and research into these anomalies, but the miner failed to follow up her suggestions.

"I did become concerned that I was being asked to make statements I considered poorly founded," she said.

"It felt to me I was endorsing an approach to the geology that I considered - I'll try to put this the polite way - inadequate."

A tight budget at the mine meant research, such as extra drill holes and extra training recommended by Newman were not carried out, the NZ Herald reported.

She went on to say that she was "not confident" that PRC realised there was sandstone in the seam near the longwall.

The drilling used – in-seam drilling- was not designed for identifying sandstone, she said.

This type of drilling can fail to identify sandstone, which could result in trapped methane gases being released.

Newman's testimony comes ahead of Harry Bell, the former chief mining inspector, who will review the dropping of independent mine inspectors more than a decade ago.

Yesterday, Solid Energy head Don Elder was accused of trying to devalue the mine prior to the accident, so that Solid could acquire it.

He was also questioned over three safety incidents as Solid's Spring Creek mine soon after the Pike River disaster.

These safety lapses included front-end loader catching fire and a machine backing over cables.

Elder took time in his testimony to criticise PRC's seam and geological investigations, saying the miner's production delays and under-performance placed pressure on the company.

He also stated that mining had caused a roof to collapse at the site, releasing a quantity of trapped gas from the seam.

'You need to have a highly-skilled set of eyes and expertise to be able to really anticipate the way that gas might come up and the way to effectively ventilate the mine.'

Poor ventilation and inadequate safety measures have been blamed as contributing factors to the tragedy.

## Canada: Vale CEO stresses work safety in wake of deaths

*Extract from NorthernLife.ca*

The CEO of Vale has sent an e-mail to the company's employees which stresses on-the-job safety in the wake of six accidents claiming the lives of eight employees over the past three months.



Vale CEO Murilo Ferreira is stressing on-the-job safety in the wake of the deaths of eight employees, including two at the company's operations in Greater Sudbury, in the past three months.

Two of these deaths occurred in Greater Sudbury last month.

Thirty-five-year-old Jason Chenier and 26-year-old Jordan Fram were killed June 8 at Vale's Stobie Mine when an unscheduled run of "muck" came down an ore pass and overtook them on the 3,000 foot level.

"I feel terribly upset when I think of these lost lives and the pain that must be felt by these families," Murilo Ferreira said, in the e-mail.

"Mining-related activities, unfortunately, involve risks. Although Vale's accident rate is below the sector average, this should not be a reason for pride.

"Because behind the accident statistics, people's lives are forever changed and everyone around them is affected: their families, friends and colleagues."

Ferreira's e-mail goes on to speak about the importance of mine safety, stating that the company's "prioritizing life and safety" value is "sacred."

"I want to make it undoubtedly clear that safety comes before production at this company," he said. "People are always more important than any results or material goods."

He urged employees to take care of themselves and their colleagues.

Steelworkers Local 6500 president Rick Bertrand, who represents production workers at Vale's operations in Greater Sudbury, gave his condolences to the families of the Vale workers who have recently died on the job.

"It's tough when you hear that there's so many people who have been killed in the workplace in three months," Bertrand said. "There's work to be done."

He said he agrees wholeheartedly with Ferreira's message about on-the-job safety.

"The Steelworkers have always taken health and safety as our number one priority, and we've

always been in the forefront when it comes to health and safety," Bertrand said.

"We want to continue to do so."

Thursday 14 July 2011

## **Expert Says New Zealand Mine Disaster Was Predicted**

*Extract from VOANews.com*

An expert witness told an inquiry into New Zealand's deadliest mining accident in a century that he had warned the mine's operators they were inviting disaster.

Harry Bell, a former chief inspector of the nation's coal mines, testified Thursday that the Pike River mine where 29 men died in November had only one entrance and an inadequate gas ventilation system. He said he had warned the mine's managers that the design was "madness."

Bell said he provided the Pike River managers with plans for improving the mine's ventilation system, but never heard back from them.

Underground methane explosions on November 19 and 24 set off a fierce fire that prevented workers from entering the mine to attempt a rescue. A coroner later concluded the 29 miners must have died from burns, concussions or suffocation shortly after the first explosion.

Another witness at the inquiry, former chief coal mine inspector Robin Bell, testified Wednesday that changes in federal legislation in the 1990s had weakened the agency responsible for inspecting mines, contributing to the Pike River disaster.

The accident was New Zealand's deadliest since 65 miners were killed at the Brunner Mine in 1896.

Following the accident, the mining company was placed in receivership and most of its employees were laid off.

## Second miner dies in Czech NWR coal pit accident

*Extract from Reuters Africa*

PRAGUE, - One miner died and another was injured in an accident at a New World Resources coal pit in the north-east of the Czech Republic on Thursday, the company said, the second fatality in as many days.

It happened in the same site as a fatality on Wednesday in the CSA section of the Karvina mine. Like the first accident, Thursday's was also a result of an underground tremor, said Ladislav Sobol, spokesman for mine operator OKD.

"There was a tremor at a depth of roughly 1,020 metres, and during the tremor a miner was killed," he said.

He could not say whether the event would halt production at the mine but added the first accident would not impair output.

Karvina, which also includes the Lazy site, produces more than 4 million tonnes of coal a year.

NWR said it was investigating the accident along with Czech regional mining authorities and results should be known in 30 days

## This week in mining accident history

**16 July 1950**

**Lark Mine**

**Lark, Utah, USA**

**Underground lead mine**

**5 killed, fire gases**

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

Five men perished from fire gases originating in a battery-charging station on the 1400 level, 5728 Incline Shaft. The fire was first detected by a pumpman who encountered smoke while being hoisted in the Lark Shaft from the 2500 level to the 1200 level.

He returned by cage to the 2500 level to notify the hoistman by telephone and died some time later after closing the water doors when a power outage occurred. The other four men died while attempting to rescue him. News of the fire was promptly phoned to the watchman on surface by the hoistman.

The U. S. and Lark Mine is comprised of two widely separated mining operations having a single underground shaft connection. The U. S. Section is operated through a haulage tunnel and has several other openings on the Bingham Canyon side of the mountain.

The Lark Section is operated through the Mascotte Tunnel entering the foot of the east slope of the Oquirrh Range at Lark, Utah, about 3 miles east of Bingham. At the time of the disaster a new connecting tunnel, the Bingham Tunnel, was being driven from the surface at Lark toward the connecting shaft in the U. S. Section. The Bingham Tunnel was started 440 feet northeast and 15 feet above the Mascotte Tunnel portal and crossed over the top of the Mascotte Tunnel at an acute angle.

At the time of the fire the face of the Bingham Tunnel had been advanced several hundred feet beyond a branch to the main Lark Shaft serving the Lark Section and there were two connections with the Lark Section workings; a 700 foot branch had been driven to intersect the Mascotte Tunnel about 250 feet outby the Lark Shaft and an intersection had been made with 2808 crosscut of the Lark Section for ventilation control purposes. The branch connection had a wooden ventilation stopping in it and the 2808 crosscut had a ventilation door installation.

Investigation revealed the fire started in the battery-charging station on the 1400 level of 5728 Incline.

The fire burned about 10 feet outby the station then extended up the inclined shaft to the upper levels and to the Mascotte Tunnel level through No. 4 Incline Shaft before it was brought under control. The battery-charging station was



situated in the open, along the side of 5728 Incline Shaft and was timbered heavily with wooden cross bars and 2-inch lagging. The power wires into the station were fashioned by nailing them to the timbers. The motor-generator charging equipment was installed on a wooden floor.

During the work stoppage electric lights and heaters had been installed under and around stationary electrical equipment throughout the mine, including the battery-charging station, to keep the motors and other electrical equipment dry and ready for resumption of work. The source of ignition was believed to be from the electrical heating equipment or from power wires contacting combustible materials.

Reports on the fire fighting activities pointed out that fog nozzle sprays were found to be an important means of pushing smoke ahead so that fire fighters could advance safely.

Sunday 17 July 2011

## **Two bodies found in flooded iron ore mine in E China**

*Extract from Xinhua*

JINAN - Two bodies were found in a flooded iron core mine in East China's Shandong province as rescue work for 24 trapped mine workers has entered the seventh day on Saturday.

The bodies of the two workers were retrieved at midday Saturday at the mine in the Fangzi district of the city of Weifang, according to the rescuers.

The mine, belonging to Zhengdong Mining Co., was flooded at around 11 pm Sunday when 31 people were working underground.

Seven of them managed to escape while the other 24 were trapped inside, according to the government of Weifang.

By 9 pm Saturday, rescue efforts for the trapped workers were going on but were hampered by huge amount of sludge and unstable water level inside the pit, according to the rescuers.

The workers were conducting maintenance work in the mine when the accident occurred, the mining company said.

An initial investigation found that an open-air stone pit located near the mine became filled with water after several days of heavy rain.

The pit collapsed, sending an estimated 20,000 cubic meters of water into the mine.

The mine received a production permit in February 2009, with mining operations scheduled to begin this October.

## **Rescue work ends in flooded SW China coal mine**

*Extract from Xinhua*

GUIYANG - Rescue work in a flooded coal mine in Guizhou province has been terminated, 14 days after a flood trapped 23 workers underground.

The rescue work in Niupeng Mine, located in Pingtang county, was halted at 4 pm Saturday, said Li Shangkuan, commander-in-chief of the rescue headquarters.

The decision was based on the opinions of experts, rescuers and relatives of the trapped workers, Li said.

The miners were very unlikely to be alive, according to an assessment by rescue experts. Twenty one workers remain missing while two bodies have been retrieved from the mine. The area where the miners are believed to be has been completely submerged.

While 406,000-cubic meters of water had been pumped out during the past 14 days, flood water was still pouring into the pit, Li said.

Also, possible secondary disasters such as cave-ins threatened further rescue operations, he said.

The local government would seal up the mine until the low water season, Li said.

The flood occurred at 9:30 am on July 2. A drainage system breakdown has been blamed for the accident.

## Two missing after Russian coal mine accident

*Extract from Reuters*

MOSCOW - Two miners were missing in an Arctic Russian mine after an accident at a coal face, the owner, a unit of steelmaker Severstal, said Sunday.

Seventy-six miners working in the pit escaped immediately after the collapse Saturday evening, which was caused by a geological event, mine operator Vorkutaugol said in a statement without going into detail.

One miner was rescued a day after the collapse, Interfax news agency reported. Two more miners were unaccounted for.

Russia, a major producer of thermal coal and coking coal for the steel industry, suffers regular mine accidents, often due to shoddy adherence to safety procedures.

Russia's creaky infrastructure, negligence and rampant corruption were in the spotlight this week following the worst river accident in nearly three decades, when a tourist boat sunk on the Volga killing up to 129 people.

The last major fatal accident occurred at the Rospadskaya mine in Kemerovo in western Siberia last year, when a methane explosion caused it to collapse, killing at least 66 people.

## Chilean miners sue government over negligence leading to 2010 mining accident that left them trapped

*Extract from NY Daily News, USA*

The now-famous Chilean miners are suing the government for negligence after they nearly died after being trapped in the mine for 69 days last year.



The Chilean miners, who survived a grueling 69-day ordeal trapped in a caved-in gold and copper mine, filed suit against the government. Louisa Gouliamai/Getty

"Everybody knows that in 2005 and 2007 there were two deaths in this mine and that since then it always had been a dangerous mine," one of the miners, Claudio Yanez, said according to CNN Chile.

The miners – who are asking for about \$541,000 each – told reporters that the lawsuit isn't about money. In fact, they said they didn't even know the amount until reporters told them, CNN reported.

In the suit, they allege that the National Geology and Mines Bureau failed to carry out proper inspections of the mine.

"We want what we went through at the bottom of that mine to be recognized. We are here to say that the 31 of us wish that all our suffering, and the suffering of our families, is recognized," miner Luis Urzua told reporters.

Thirty-one of the 33 miners who were stuck underground joined the suit against the Chilean government. It was not immediately clear why all 33 did not join the suit.

Since their rescue, which was said to cost somewhere between \$10 and \$20 million, the miners have fielded book, movie and promotional offers. But they said they have not made millions off of their adventure – and in fact a "majority" are suffering from money problems, one miner said according to CNN.

"There's a myth that us miners have a lot of money, but that is not the truth," Omar Reygadas said.

Monday 18 July 2011

## **NZ: Pike inquest restarts**

*Extract from stuff.co.nz*

A Department of Conservation contract engineer who visited Pike River Coal three days before the deadly explosion last year says he recalls a "steady breeze" underground.

The inquiry into the Pike River tragedy recommenced this afternoon after foggy weather in Christchurch delayed the arrival of the commissioners in Greymouth.

Mark Smith, an engineer contracted by Department of Conservation to liaise with Pike River Coal said he and two DOC staff, and a West Coast Regional Council official visited the mine on November 16 last year.

"The main purpose of our visit was to see the hydro-mining of the first bridging panel. My impression while underground was that there was a steady breeze in the tunnels due to the ventilation," he said.

Pike River Coal had changed its approach to mining the Pike River coal seam in mid-2009, Smith said.

Due to concerns over land subsidence, the company decide to start "trial-mining", so they could extract coal and also monitor the effect on the environment, Smith said.

Under cross-examination from EPMU counsel Nigel Hampton, Smith was asked why the Department of Conservation had not raised any concerns that a second exit from the mine had not been constructed.

The second exit had been part of Pike River Coal's work plans since 2008, but it had not been built.

"I had no reason to be concerned, we are not underground miners, we had no knowledge or

experience on which to base any concerns... we didn't raise any concerns."

James Murphy, workplace health and safety policy manager for the Department of Labour, also told the hearing today mining was not one of the industries considered "over-represented" in rates of serious injures and deaths.

"Mining doesn't feature in those, it comes further down the list but obviously what we do is that when things go wrong in mining they're often catastrophic."

However, per employee mining is in the top five of accident rates, he said.

Two Australian experts have written a report for the Department of Labour on the Pike River explosion, Murphy said.

### **'FACE' TO ADDRESS INQUIRY**

The face of Pike River Coal, Peter Whittall, will this week front up at the royal commission.

Whittall, who has not publicly spoken about the Pike River explosion in months, is expected to address the many issues raised against Pike River Coal last week, including criticism from Solid Energy chief executive Don Elder, expert geologist Jane Newman and former mines inspector Harry Bell.



**DUE TO SPEAK:** Pike River Coal's chief executive Peter Whittall has been the company's public face for the crisis at its Pike River mine. IAIN MCGREGOR/The Press

Criticism last week included views that Pike River had been over-optimistic in production projections, underfinanced, had not properly researched its coal seam and failed to ventilate the gassy mine adequately.

In April, the Department of Labour announced it had asked for an extension to its investigation of the Pike River explosion.

The department has until November this year to decide whether it will lay charges under the Health and Safety Act.

It is also likely to face tough questioning as the agency tasked with ensuring workplaces are safe.

Whittall, the chief executive of Pike River Coal (in receivership), will follow the appearance of the Department of Labour officials.

Phase one is setting the context of the inquiry, while phase two, which is scheduled for September 5 to September 23, will focus on the search and rescue effort.

The commissioners must report their findings by March 31 next year.

Tuesday 19 July 2011

## **Bodies of 2 miners recovered from Russian coal mine**

*Extract from RIA Novosti*

Rescuers on Tuesday found the bodies of two miners who have been trapped underground in the crippled Severnaya mine in Russia's Komi Republic since Saturday, the Emergencies Ministry said.

The miners remained underground after a collapse destroyed the mineshaft. "It was established that the miners died during the collapse," the ministry said in a statement.

They are the unlucky ones, of the 79 miners initially trapped in the mine, 76 were immediately lifted to safety.

Initial Emergencies Ministry reports said that the three trapped miners were alive. However, only

one more miner was found and brought to the surface alive. He is presently in the hospital.

According to the local emergencies services, the collapse occurred as a result of a rock fall. The ventilation shaft at the mine was not damaged, the statement said.

The Severnaya mine is operated by Vorkutaugol, one of the largest mining companies operating in the Pechorsky Coal Basin, Russia's second largest after Kuzbass. The company is owned by Severstal, one of the biggest steel holdings in Russia, through its subsidiary Severstal-Resurs.

## **All 12 miners trapped in northeast China rescued alive**

*Extract from Channel 6 News Online*

DALIAN, CHINA (BNO NEWS) -- Rescue teams on Tuesday successfully pulled out all twelve trapped miners from a tunnel that caved-in in the northeast region of China, local media reported.

The incident occurred on Monday morning in the city of Dalian, located in China's northeast province of Liaoning, when the tunnel, which is under construction, caved-in and trapped the miners, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

On Tuesday afternoon, at around 4 p.m. local time and some 36 hours after the ordeal began, all of the miners had been rescued alive through a rescue duct that had been completed earlier that morning. During the rescue efforts, food, water, and cell phones were provided to the trapped miners through small ventilation ducts constructed since Monday.

A cheering crowd greeted the workers as they came out. Some of the miners even lit up a cigarette to celebrate their rescue. All twelve people were reported to be in good condition, but they were sent to a local hospital for medical treatment and examinations.



## USA: Owner of W.Va. mine where 29 died slams union

*Extract from Associated Press*

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — The United Mine Workers of America says a notice the new owners posted at a West Virginia mine where 29 men died in an explosion last year is a standard industry tactic aimed at discouraging attempts to unionize.

The union knows about the memo that Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources posted at the Upper Big Branch mine, discouraging unionization on the day it bought Massey Energy, UMW spokesman Phil Smith said Tuesday.

Mine Safety and Health News, an independent newsletter, obtained the memo and posted the text online.

"Signing a Union Authorization Card is like signing a blank check. You will not know what it is going to cost you or your family in the future," the memo said, reminding workers of their legal right to refuse to sign.

"Unions are a business. They need monthly dues and assessments from employees to survive," it continued. "We believe you need to keep all of your take home pay and not share it with any union."

The memo also pledged management would listen to any worker with a complaint, concern or question.

"It's not uncommon for the mine management to post these policies so as to inform people of the rights they're entitled to under labor laws," said Alpha spokesman Ted Pile. "It's standard practice."

The UMW agrees.

"This is standard union-avoidance language straight out of a union-busting consultant's playbook," Smith said. "I suspect that something similar is posted at just about every one of the

larger nonunion mines in America, no matter who owns it."

Still, he called the presence of such a notice at Upper Big Branch "sadly ironic," given the tragedy that occurred April 5, 2010, and a new study suggesting a correlation between union representation and a drop in coal mine injuries and fatalities.

Investigators have cited disregard for the industry's most basic safety standards as an underlying reason for the methane- and coal dust-fueled blast that ripped through Upper Big Branch in the deadliest mine disaster in four decades.

Last month, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration revealed evidence that Massey kept two sets of safety records, one for government inspectors and a more accurate, production-centered set for itself.

Before the blast, Massey had a reputation for putting profits before safety. Upper Big Branch alone was cited for 600 violations in less than a year and a half before the blast.

MSHA has drafted its final report but told victims' families it probably won't be delivered until October, in part because the agency needs more time to complete a list of violations that contributed to the disaster.

The UMW represents some miners in the investigation even though Upper Big Branch was a non-union operation. Although employees often contact the UMW, Smith said he is not aware of any active organizing campaign at Upper Big Branch.

But he pointed to a May research paper, funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, that examined 15 years' worth of data and concluded that "unionization predicts a sizable and robust decline in both traumatic injuries and fatalities."

"I construe these results as evidence for a 'real' union safety effect in U.S. underground coal

mining," author Alison Morantz wrote in the Stanford Law School report.

In January, UMW President Cecil Roberts said that while it's not perfect, "Alpha's overall safety record is better than Massey's."

"It should come as no surprise to Alpha that we strongly believe both the company and the workers would be better off with a larger union presence at the company moving forward," he said, "and we are working toward that goal."

The union currently represents about 1,500 Alpha employees and thousands of retirees.

It reached a new contract agreement with Alpha last week for workers at the Cumberland and Emerald mines in Greene County, Pa., and affirmed it will continue to represent workers at the idled Wabash mine in Illinois if it reopens by the end of 2013.

Wednesday 20 July 2011

## **USA: Suit by respiratory maker blames black lung on Massey**

*Extract from Charleston Gazette*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Lawyers for one of the nation's largest makers of respirators have opened a new legal front in a longstanding dispute over black lung disease: a suit seeking to hold the former Massey Energy responsible for illnesses that miners have blamed on allegedly faulty breathing devices.

Attorneys for Mine Safety Appliances, or MSA, filed the suit Wednesday against Massey's new owner, Alpha Natural Resources, in Mingo Circuit Court. They also named former Massey CEO Don Blankenship as a defendant.

Basically, the complaint alleges that Massey officials for years did not comply with federal regulations that require mine operators to maintain proper ventilation and limit miners' exposure to coal dust that causes deadly black lung disease.

MSA lawyers filed the complaint to make Alpha a third-party defendant in an existing suit filed by

one-time Massey foreman Dusty Dotson, who developed lung disease after working for years in underground coal mines.

The suit by Dotson against MSA is one of hundreds of such cases filed in the coalfields against manufacturers of respirators such as MSA and 3M Corp. that miners allege were faulty and caused or contributed their black lung disease.

But MSA argues the blame really lies with Massey, citing repeated ventilation and dust-control violations at three different operations where Dotson worked, including the Aracoma Alma No. 1 Mine where two workers died in a January 2006 fire.

MSA is expected to file more suits in similar situations in response to allegations that its respirators were to blame for miners' contracting black lung.

"For years, our company has been the target of these lawsuits, and we think that target has to shift," said Mark Deasy, a spokesman for Cranberry Township, Pa.-based MSA. "You have to look at the root cause."

Officials from Alpha Natural Resources offered no immediate comment on the MSA complaint.

Thursday 21 July 2011

## **Two Colombian miners dead, three rescued**

*Extract from UPI*

SOCOTA, Colombia, -- Rescue teams Thursday sought two coal miners trapped and believed dead in a cave-in in central Colombia, officials said.

Three other miners were rescued in the collapse outside Socota in the Boyaca department Wednesday, RCN Radio reported.

"The probability of finding the bodies alive is minimal, but we will continue with the rescue operations," Carlos Ivan Marquez, who is directing the rescue effort, said.

The Socota Mayor William Correa said the mine, which is owned by Polish investors, is one of the safest in the region.

There have been a reported 29 mine related deaths this year alone in Colombia.

Friday 22 July 2011

## **NZ: Pike boss accused of trying to dodge responsibility**

*Extract from [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz)*

The Pike River mine entrance has been reopened today as part of stabilisation work - a step closer to possibly recovering the remains of the 29 men trapped inside.

Dramatic photos of the work were released about an hour after boss Peter Whittall finished his evidence at the Royal Commission hearing into the tragedy.

He was accused of dodging responsibility for the explosions which killed the 29 workers in November last year.

Statutory mine manager Steve Ellis, from PricewaterhouseCoopers, said the removal of the portal seal was one of the last steps before declaring the mine stable.



Photograph taken during the removal of the portal seal at the Pike River Mine.

Bernie Monk, family spokesman for Pike River mine victims, today said he was thankful for the work being done at the mine, but said it should have happened months ago.

"Anyway, I'm not going to dwell on the past. I'm pleased that we've got in this situation and the long journey is going to begin.

"The families are never going to go away from trying to get their guys back, and we are going to be putting pressure on from all corners."

Ellis said they installed a timber and brattice seal at the 70m mark in the tunnel and have been pumping nitrogen inside to create a balance chamber.

"What we don't want in the mine is oxygen, so it can only take nitrogen or blow nitrogen out and that's great. It's the safest place for us to be.

"Once that was done, we got an excavator in and have taken out all the fill material that was put in, which was gravel and shotcrete."

Two seal containers, one being part of the seal and the other used as the GAG docking station, was removed.

Ellis said the removal of the portal was a "nice milestone", and the next step was installing two steel air doors at the 40m mark in a couple of weeks.

"This is the start of a process ... and is coming towards the end of the mine stabilisation work.

"When the doors are installed, we have one other job left to do, which is seal the slimline shaft which is above the mine and turn the nitrogen off.

"And then I'll consider the mine stable."

He said stabilisation work was expected to be completed in August.

Work would still need to be done to recover the remains of the 29 men as a fall in the mine was blocking access.

### **FINANCES DIDN'T IMPACT ON SAFETY - WHITTALL**

Whittall has been accused of trying to dodge responsibility for the disaster, after today saying the mine manager was legally responsible for safety.

Whittall had spent the last three days giving evidence, and was questioned this morning on his level of responsibility at the mine.

He also told the Royal Commission this morning that explosives had been used underground during the week of the explosion.

Whittall said financial issues being experienced by the mine did not impact the company's safety underground.

Outside court, Monk, spokesman for the families, said Whittall had appeared to be dodging responsibility for the explosion.

"I'm in charge of a business, if something goes wrong I'm the person that gets in the firing line, so I'll leave it at that."

However Monk was certain the inquiry would "get to the truth".

"We've been dragged through this for eight months now."

The first phase of the inquiry has now concluded, following a two week hearing.

The second phase of the inquiry, set for September, will examine the search and rescue operation.

## **SECOND EXIT CRITICISED**

Pike River coal mine failed health and safety regulations because it had no suitable second exit, the royal commission heard yesterday.

Whittall spent a second day being grilled in the Greymouth District Court over claims the underground mine lacked a second exit, had inadequate ventilation, poorly managed lethal gases and had financial problems.

Whittall told the inquiry into the explosions that killed 29 men in November the company deemed its 108-metre ventilation shaft an "escape way" and not a secondary exit from the mine. Its 2.3-kilometre tunnel was the primary exit but workers were directed to go to a fresh airbase in a "secondary safety scenario", he said. That decision was based on risk assessments done in early 2010 by the mine's

operational staff, Mines Rescue Service and the Department of Labour's mine inspector.

"We believed the fresh air base was the better option, making it a safer place for people to go to," Whittall said.

Simon Mount, counsel assisting the commission, said underground mining regulations required mines to have a secondary exit for an emergency, which Whittall accepted. The fresh air base was not linked to the surface, so was not an exit. Whittall said the shaft had ladders and safety harnesses for workers to use to escape but he was unaware if a trial evacuation had ever been done.

However, Mount said a Pike River emergency equipment and self-escape audit, done in August 2009 by Mines Rescue Service, highlighted serious concerns about using the ventilation shaft as an escape route.

A second exit had been planned for the mine since 2005 but had never been built.

Whittall said six options for the second exit were marked on the draft mine plan lodged on November 10, 2010, nine days before the first explosion.

It was revealed Pike River Coal wanted mine inspector numbers boosted in a submission to the Department of Labour over improving hazard management within the underground mining industry in 2008.

A report on the mine's gas management in May last year raised concerns about a number of issues, including minimal data on gas content, inadequate drainage, high volumes of methane per meter of the thick coal seam and poor workforce knowledge of risks of gas drainage holes and pipelines. Whittall said he had not seen the report. Whittall's lawyer asked whether questioning him over the gas report was therefore appropriate but Justice Graham Panckhurst said Whittall was the sole Pike witness and held a very senior position at the relevant time. "One might have thought that some of these aspects would've been, if not



directly reported to him by the report writer, at least drawn to his attention, so the Commission is going to allow the questions to be asked."

Financial issues and over-estimating the viability was also raised. Mount asked if a report in 2005 citing the company was "over-optimistic" was correct.

"The report writer thought so but that wasn't me," Whittall said. But he admitted the lack of cash had "become an issue" and the company had been in discussions with its major shareholder, New Zealand Oil and Gas, in a bid to raise \$70 million at the time of the November explosions.

## Mining dictionary

### A guide to coal mining terminology

#### A

#### **AUXILIARY FAN**

Used in conjunction with air ducting to direct a portion of the main ventilating current to the working face.



22 cub Auxiliary Fan with a MI Power FLP enclosure

-Ed



### Engineering safety seminars

The **21<sup>st</sup> Mechanical Engineering Safety Seminar** will be held at Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 10 August and Thursday 11 August 2011.

The **21<sup>st</sup> Electrical Engineering Safety Seminar** will be held at Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 9 November and Thursday 10 November 2011.

### Check Inspectors Conference

The next Check Inspectors Conference will be held at Panthers, Penrith on 14 September 2011.

For more information on seminars and conferences, see:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/resources/seminars-and-conferences>