



Mining Accident News No.1128

10 to 21 September 2011

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Saturday 10 September 2011

Alaska: Mining accident kills Juneau resident

Extract from JuneauEmpire.com

Blast underground results in death

Coeur Alaska has released the name of the employee who died Wednesday morning at Kensington Gold Mine as 30-year-old Juneau resident Joe Tagaban.

Coeur states Tagaban died while performing his regular duties underground. He had been employed at the mine for more than a year.

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration is investigating the accident at Kensington mine. The agency says preliminary information indicates Tagaban was near a hole he'd previously drilled. The hole apparently intersected a stope, an open space generally defined as a void left by previous mining activity. There was a blast and rock traveled through the drill hole, striking Tagaban.

"It is with great sadness that we report the death of Joe Tagaban. He was a respected and well-liked employee at Kensington and he will be greatly missed. Our collective thoughts and prayers go out to Joe's family and his co-workers," Coeur d'Alene Mines Corp. President and Chief Executive Officer Mitchell J. Krebs said in a release.

This marks the first fatality at Kensington since its opening last summer.

Sunday 11 September 2011

Georgia: One Dies in Mining Accident in Tkibuli

Extract from Civil.ge

A 35-year-old miner died after apparently a blasting operation went wrong in a coal mine in Tkibuli, western Georgia, on September 9.

A senior executive from coal mine operator company, Saknakhshiri, in charge of safety, said the incident was caused due to violation of procedures and that the details would be known after the full investigation.

Tamaz Dolaberidze, president of metallurgical, mining, chemical industry workers trade union, told Civil.ge that according to preliminary information the miner died apparently of improperly carried out underground blast operation. He said the miner was not in a safe place when the blast occurred.

This is the fourth fatal incident in the Tkibuli mine over past eighteen months.

Nine miners died in three separate explosions in the same mine in a period between March, 2010 and January, 2011; explosions were attributed to methane gas leak.

Coal mine in Tkibuli is operated by Saknakhshiri, a daughter company of Georgian Industrial Group, a conglomerate affiliated to lawmaker from the ruling party, Davit Bezhuashvili - a brother of Gela Bezhuashvili, chief of the Georgian intelligence service.

NSW: Killed miners remembered

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Prime Minister's paid tribute to the more than 1,800 miners killed in the Hunter Valley over the past 210 years in a memorial service in Cessnock.



The Jim Comerford Memorial Wall is inscribed with the names of 1800 fallen mineworkers

Julia Gillard attended the 16th annual Mineworkers Federation service at the memorial wall which lists the name of every miner killed in Hunter Valley mines.

She also used yesterday's service to remember those lost in the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Ms Gillard made special mention of miner Peter Jones who died at Chain Valley Bay in June.

"Four men were killed in the Gretley disaster in 1996," she said.

"And three since 2009 including one man Peter Jones killed at Lake Macquarie just 13 weeks ago.

"It is well that we mourn them, we must always do that."

Ms Gillard says Australia will ratify an International Labour Organisation convention concerning safety and health in mines, known as Convention 176.

She says while Australia's safety standards are high it is important we work with other countries to improve mine safety internationally.

"The international Labor organisation has proposed a convention concerning safety and health in mines," she said.

"While Australia has exceeded this standard we must play our part in lifting standards in other nations.

"I can therefore confirm today that Australia will ratify convention 176."

Monday 12 September 2011

Two dead following SW China colliery roof collapse

Extract from Xinhua

KUNMING - Two workers were confirmed dead and another was injured after the roof of a colliery collapsed Sunday in southwest Yunnan province, the local government said Monday.

The accident happened at 1:07 pm Sunday in a pit of the Yangjiagou Coal Mine in the coal-rich

Fuyuan county, the county government said in a press release.

Of the four workers who were doing repair work in the pit, only one escaped, it said.

The three trapped workers were found and pulled out of the pit Monday, but the two died while hospitalized.

The third worker is being treated at the county hospital, the document said.

The government did not identify the victims.

The local work safety bureau has launched an investigation.

Tuesday 13 September 2011

S.Africa: Fatality at Ezulwini Mine

Extract from The Sacramento Bee, Canada

TORONTO and JOHANNESBURG, - First Uranium Corporation ("First Uranium" or the "Company") with deep regret announced today that a fall of ground accident has claimed the life of a rock drill operator at its Ezulwini Mine. The incident occurred on 13 September 2011 on number 50 level.

In terms of section 54 of the Mine Health and Safety Act (South Africa), the Department of Mineral Resources has issued an instruction to withdraw all workers from the reef horizon until such time as an investigation into the incident has been completed. Accordingly, underground mining activity at the Ezulwini Mine has been suspended.

The Company has extended its sincere condolences to the family, friends and co-workers of the deceased.

This week in mining accident history

12 September 1984

Berger No.2 Mine

Evarts, Harlan County, Kentucky, USA

Underground coal mine

4 killed, roof fall

Source: www.usmra.com

On September 12, 1984, coal production in the Berger No. 2 Mine, owned by the Bon Trucking Company Inc, was halted to permit repair of a bridge conveyor. Moments later, the creaking of posts prompted some miners to flee the face area.

Soon after, a large portion of the roof fell, covering the bridge conveyor and part of the mining machine. The collapse instantly killed four men, and seriously injured another.

MSHA investigators determined that the disaster was caused by the following conditions/practices:

- Violations of the roof control plan, including excessive entry widths, missing permanent supports, the unapproved second mining of pillars, and a failure to provide a supply of supports within 500 feet of the face.
- In addition, the failure to provide additional roof supports in areas having subnormal roof conditions, as evidenced by horsebacks and swags in the mine floor, also violated the roof control plan.
- Faulty pillar recovery methods, including the complete extraction of pillars, and a failure to install posts during and after mining.
- Failure to provide an accurate mine map at the surface.
- Failure to conduct a preshift examination that would have identified subnormal roof conditions on the day of the disaster.

Wednesday 14 September 2011

Colombia: 7 die in mining accident

Extract from Colombia reports

At least seven people died, and two were wounded when a mine collapsed in western

Colombia in the early hours of Wednesday morning, Colombian media reported.

According to government secretary Cruz Palacio, the accident occurred around 1:30am at the Ulloa gold mine in the municipality of Arato-Yuto, in the department of Choco.

"We could only remove two people alive, the others died instantly," the government official explained.



The two that were wounded were immediately transferred to a local hospital where they are recovering from the trauma.

The mayor's office is investigating if the mine has the permits required for mining in the area.

Thursday 15 September 2011

NZ: Pike management 'ignored' fire threat

Extract from stuff.co.nz

LATEST: Footage of a large fire burning at the entrance of the Pike River mine has been shown at an inquiry into the disaster.

Timothy Whyte, an Australian mining expert with the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy union, told the inquiry this afternoon the fire, on November 30, was preventable.

The royal commission of inquiry is reviewing the November 19, 2010 disaster that killed 29 men in the West Coast coal mine.

The fire was started after Pike River contractors attempting to seal the mine used polyurethane, which was highly flammable.

Whyte said the use of polyurethane had been "expressly ruled out" in an earlier risk assessment because of the potential for ignition.

He believed Pike River management had "simply ignored" the risk assessment stating the use of polyurethane was dangerous.

The fire took more than an hour to be extinguished and destroyed the mine entrance's CCTV feed, he said.

The sealing of the mine's entrance was delayed by 12 hours as a result of the fire, he said.

The footage of the fire shows the polyurethane self-igniting before growing into a large blaze.

Whyte said the smoke produced hydrogen cyanide, which was a carcinogenic and a "deadly gas".

"If there were survivors [underground], they would have been breathing in hydrogen cyanide."

'NO OPPORTUNITY FOR RE-ENTRY'

Gas levels showed there was no "window of opportunity" for Mines Rescue to safely re-enter the Pike River mine to attempt to rescue 29 missing men, the inquiry into the tragedy has heard.

Australian mine gas expert Darren Brady today told the commission that initial gas monitoring was "highly unreliable" in deciding whether the mine was safe to re-enter.

Brady is a chemist with 20 years experience in mine gases and a manager of Australia's Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station (SIMTARS).

A SIMTARS initial response team, including Brady, arrived at the mine site on the morning after the the first explosion for gas monitoring.

Monitoring after the November 19 explosion was from the ventilation shaft and there was no guarantee gas measured there represented the mine's explosion risk or if an underground fire existed, he said.



A mine gas expert has told the royal commission into the Pike River mine tragedy there was "sufficient oxygen in the mine to support an explosion". *Source: The Daily Telegraph*

However, they showed a risk of further explosions.

"Data generated from gas samples collected indicated that a second explosion was possible. There was evidence of sufficient methane, enough oxygen and indications that a fire might exist.

"On this basis, the atmosphere could not be defined as safe for re-entry, which means the opportunity to re-enter did not exist.

"A key consideration when deciding to send a rescue team into a mine following an explosion has to be 'Is there going to be another explosion?'"

Early last November 24 the first gas level samples became available from the first borehole drilled after the blast.

However, Brady said early interpretation of the data indicated an ignition source existed so a decision was made that it was unsafe to re-enter the mine.

Earlier this week the inquiry heard the Mines Rescue Service had initially planned to re-enter the mine at 3pm on November 24 but a risk assessment warned of explosion risk and it was cancelled.

The second blast occurred at 2.38pm that day, destroying all hope of any survivors.

"From this point onwards, the data did not indicate that a 'window of opportunity' existed and a further two explosions occurred."

He said there were no guidelines for a set amount of time between explosions and being able to safely re-enter a mine.

It had been initially difficult to confirm whether the mine was on fire in the days following the first explosion.

Brady said photographs of smoke coming out of the mine could have been from the initial explosion rather than a continuing fire.

"It was interesting when the GAG was operating and we had a lot of steam, there were reports of smoke ... It would appear it was steam rather than smoke."

Early gas levels could also have been a result of residual gases from the first explosion rather than gases from coal heating up, he said.

"When you've got a possibility, you have to assume it's there ... There was enough evidence to say it was possible."

He said whether a mine was sealed or not, the risk of explosion remained.

After Brady completes his evidence today, two other Australian mine experts will be next to give evidence at the inquiry in Greymouth District Court.

Friday 16 September 2011

Welsh mining tragedy: hopes dashed in search for missing miners as fourth body found in shaft

Extract from The Telegraph, UK

The bodies of four miners trapped in a flooded Welsh colliery have been found, dashing their families' hopes that they would be brought out alive and confirming the worst mining disaster for a generation.

Rescuers discovered the last of the miners on Friday evening after two days spent searching the colliery's many tunnels.

Police immediately began an investigation into what led to the deaths of David Powell, 50, Phillip Hill, 45, Charles Breslin, 62, and Garry Jenkins, 39.

Peter Hain, the local MP for Neath and a former Welsh Secretary, spoke for the devastated community of Pontardawe, near Swansea.

“This is the one end that we all feared but hoped against hope would not happen,” he said. “We have seen extraordinary courage shown by the families right through the night in torturous hours of waiting, and then finding out first that one miner had been found and not knowing who it was, and then another.

“We can’t even imagine what they have been through. This has been a stab right through the heart of the local community. There is a long tradition of mining here but nobody expected the tragedies that happened in past generations would happen today.”

The dead men had been part of a small team of seven working a seam 300ft below ground in the Gleision colliery on Thursday morning, when they accidentally breached the walls of an adjacent mine that was flooded. Water rushed in, blocking the exit of four of the men and forcing the others to scramble to safety.

After the alarm was sounded, more than 50 rescue workers headed to the hillside to try to bring the others to the surface. At first, hopes were high after two of the survivors, who included the son of one of the trapped men, said they thought their workmates may have found sanctuary in refuges dotted along the mineshaft.

But as four powerful pumps removed water from the drift mine, which stretches about a third of a mile into the hillside, rescuers began to discover bodies in flooded tunnels. The first was found in the early hours of yesterday and the others throughout the day.

The tragedy began to unfold at about 9am on Thursday as the team of miners prepared to blast into the coal face to open up a new tunnel close to the floor of the pit. As the final

preparations were made, five men took shelter around the corner in the lower tunnel to shield themselves from the blast.

Unknown to the men, they were just a few feet away from a long-forgotten chamber, packed with water after one of the wettest summers of recent years.

After the explosion a torrent of water broke through, sweeping into the lower shaft. One of the men, who was crouched close to the corner, was overwhelmed and almost certainly drowned instantly. Another began scrambling along the 50 yards towards the entrance to the main shaft. Just minutes from safety, he too was overwhelmed and swept into the bottom of the mine. A similar fate was thought to have befallen the two other dead men. Of the five, only Malcolm Fyfield, the 46-year-old manager of the mine, survived, using his intimate knowledge of the tunnels to make his escape.

It took him more than an hour to haul himself through long-forgotten mine workings to the surface. On his way he passed through rubble and sludge, breathing in noxious fumes. Last night, Mr Fyfield was in a medically induced coma due to a head injury and breathing the “bad air” during his escape.

Two other men, Mark Lloyd, 45, and Daniel Powell, 23, had earlier set off along the 820ft-long main shaft to fetch equipment intended to remove the rubble before the explosion.

The pair were making their way back in when they heard the charge of the water ahead of them. They turned and fled to safety before raising the alarm, prompting the biggest mine rescue operation in Britain for a generation.

For Daniel Powell the trauma was even more acute because his father, David, was among those trapped.

By the early hours of yesterday morning, the rescuers had pumped out enough water to reach the bottom of the mine where they discovered the first of the bodies. Still submerged, it took around 12 hours to be recovered.

Another body was discovered three hours later, with further discoveries at midday and in the early evening.

The ordeal for the families had been made worse by the fact that, as the news was relayed to them, they did not know who was dead and who was still being searched for. One friend said: "It is difficult to imagine the agonies they have been going through. It has been bad news after bad news."

The deaths marked a return of the sort of mining disaster that it was thought had been consigned to history. The most recent significant mining accident in Britain was in March 1979 at Golborne colliery, near Wigan. Three men were killed there when a fireball shot 200 yards along a tunnel.

Last night the Archbishop of Wales, the Most Rev Dr Barry Morgan, said prayers would be said for the miners and their loved ones in churches across the country tomorrow. The archbishop, whose father worked as a miner, added: "There was a time when there were mines across Wales, and with them came accidents. We thought that those days were long gone, but sadly the events of the past two days showed that is sadly no longer the case.

"It is not an ideal occupation – my father was a miner and I knew first hand about what a tough and dangerous job it was, and still is. So, my heart goes out to the families of those killed in Gleision colliery.

"I hope they will gain some comfort from knowing that everyone in Wales is behind them. The whole community is heartbroken for them."

TB, hearing loss and silicosis still big problems facing South African mining industry, says lawyer

Extract from Creamer Media's Mining Weekly

The South African mining industry's commitment to preventing fatalities and accidents – in line with the '2013 Milestones' plan and other

initiatives – has placed significant emphasis on health and safety, says law firm Brink Cohen Le Roux partner **Willem le Roux**.

However, he states that hearing loss, tuberculosis and silicosis are still the biggest health problems facing the industry, which has led to a reactive approach by mining companies to health and safety.

"It is important for the employee and the people that suffer as a result of the employee's injuries or disabilities, as a result of work, to be compensated and to be remunerated for damages sustained. And it is important for the employee as well as the employer to understand the laws governing health and safety in industry."

South Africa has two statutory systems for the payment of compensation for work-related deaths, injuries and diseases. These are contained in the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (Coida) and the Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act (ODMWA).

Coida has a general application, while the ODMWA applies specifically to claims for defined compensable diseases, contracted as a result of work performed at 'controlled mines' or the performance of 'risk work'.

The ODMWA definitions include diseases such as asbestosis, pneumoconiosis, silicosis and tuberculosis, besides others.

Coida applies to certain occupational diseases not covered by the ODMWA and to injuries arising out of and in the course of the employee's employment and resulting in personal injury, illness or death.

Le Roux explains that, in terms of accidents, the two pieces of legislation differ and that there are a few loopholes to consider. "An accident must happen in employment to be compensable. There must be a relationship between the nature of the accident and the workplace. However, if a person should be struck by lightning, for example, it is not regarded as an accident in

terms of the legislation and cannot be compensated, unless the employee was working in a lightning-exposed position.

“In cases of an accident, the employee and the company are covered by Coida but, if it is not an accident, and there was negligence on the [part] of the employer, the employee (or the employees’ dependents) can sue the employer,” he states.

Le Roux says it is important to note that the usual compensation payable to employees or the independents in terms of Coida or the ODMWA may be significantly less than the amount of damages that would be awarded by a court if the employee or dependant were to succeed with a common law claim.

Coida pays an increased compensation if the employer is proven negligent, while the ODMWA does not make provision for the award of any increased compensation in the event of the negligence of the employer.

Further, Le Roux points out there are also challenges arising from the death of an employee at the workplace. “The use of State pathologists for postmortems presents a significant challenge. Rules are not being complied with, a proper examination is not conducted and biopsies are not taken. “I have experienced State pathologists who are not qualified to do the job, have no training and do not know what to look for. This could result in the wrong diagnosis of death and also affects the outcome of whether the employee had a work-related death or died of natural causes.

“It is, thus, important to know whether an employee has certain illnesses and whether this employee contracted the disease while in the employment of a particular company,” he says.

USA: Coal Mines Safer Since Upper Big Branch Disaster, Data Shows

Extract from FairWarning, USA

Since 29 miners perished in an explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in April, 2010, the deadliest mine disaster in 40 years, U.S. coal mines have grown safer, according to government inspection data.

Industry and federal officials attribute the improvement to increased enforcement of regulations and better training by mining companies themselves, The Wall Street Journal reports.

As measured by hours of inspection time, serious violations fell 12 percent during the first three quarters of 2011 compared with 2010, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

On the other hand, 14 coal miners have been killed in accidents so far this year. That compares with 48 killed while working last year — including the 29 at Upper Big Branch— and 18 in 2009.

MSHA, which oversees the nation’s 14,500 mines, including 2,000 coal mines, was criticized for lax enforcement after the deadly accident at the Massey Energy Co. mine in West Virginia.

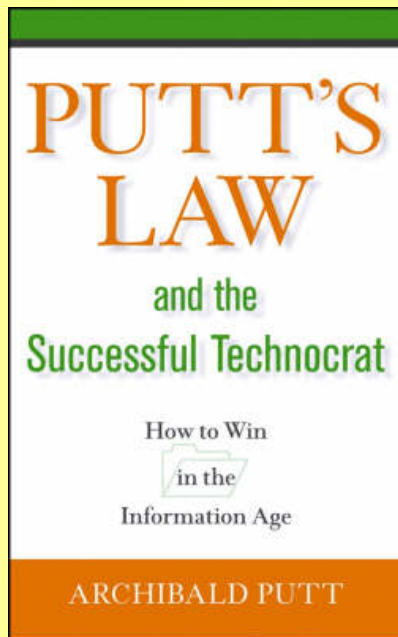
The agency responded by targeting mines that it viewed as posing the greatest risk. Several were shut down until improvements were made, and a few were closed permanently, according to The Journal.

“I believe the efforts we’re making are having a positive impact on improving mine safety in this country,” said Joe Main, Assistant Secretary of Labor and head of MSHA.

But Phil Smith, spokesman for the United Mine Workers of America, warns fewer violations don’t necessarily mean mines are getting safer.

“There are still many mines out there which are not following the law and appear not to care to do so,” Smith told The Journal. “The mines weren’t any safer for the 14 coal miners killed thus far this year.”

Quote of the week



"Technology is dominated by two types of people: those who understand what they do not manage, and those who manage what they do not understand."

Putt's Law
(1981)

Saturday 17 September 2011

ChinaCoal's Shaanxi mines closed after fatal accident

Extract from Reuters, USA

China National Coal Group Corp's (ChinaCoal) mining operations in north Shaanxi Province were suspended after eight miners died in a colliery flooding at one of the company's subsidiaries there, state media Xinhua News reported.

Shaanxi Vice Governor Li Xiaopeng said the flooding exposed "serious problems" in the implementation of safety measures and vowed a thorough investigation into the accident.

ChinaCoal, a state-owned company, must conduct a safety overhaul before operations can resume, Xinhua reported officials as saying.

The workers' bodies were retrieved on Saturday after they had been trapped underground in the

flooded coal mine in Shanyin County a day ago. Three others remain missing.

The 900,000 tonnes a year mine is operated by ChinaCoal's subsidiary Jinhaiyang Yuanbaowan Coal Company.

ChinaCoal, the country's second largest coal producer, increased its coal output by 22.9 percent to 154 million metric tonnes last year, the report said.

Sunday 18 September 2011

NZ: Gruelling questions for blasts mine CEO

Extract from stuff.co.nz

Former Pike River Coal boss Peter Whittall faces an intense grilling this week over his role in the tragic aftermath of last year's mine explosions that left 29 families without sons, brothers and fathers.

Whittall will be the last person to take the stand in this phase of the Royal Commission of Inquiry, which has brought to light failings in the mine's safety procedures and flaws in the police's handling of the rescue operation.

He faces hours of gruelling questioning from lawyers representing the families of the dead miners and other parties over why he didn't do more to ensure the safety of his workers and why he continued to hold out hope to the families the men might still be alive right until the time of the second explosion.

"It's not going to be a pleasant experience for him," a lawyer, who asked not to be named, said. "He's going to have to answer some pretty tough questions. As chief executive of the mine, many are going to hold him ultimately responsible for what went on and will expect him to shoulder some of the blame."

With his testimony due to come immediately after that of some of the bereaved families, it is likely to be a very emotional and charged week.

Emotions ran high last week as the police's performance as lead agency in the rescue operation, was questioned.

Superintendent Gary Knowles, who headed the rescue operation, wept as he gave evidence and apologised to the families over the way they had learnt their loved ones had died in November's mine explosions.

Mines Rescue was considering re-entering the mine on November 24 – five days after the initial explosion – when a second more powerful explosion occurred, destroying all hopes that any of the 29 trapped men had survived.

Knowles and Whittall, who were due to hold a scheduled briefing with the families less than 90 minutes later, discussed who would advise the families and how the news should be delivered.

Whittall wanted to break the news himself but started the meeting by announcing search and rescue staff were about to re-enter the mine, at which point the families started clapping. Knowles told the commission it was that point he stepped in and informed the families of the second devastating explosion.

"It was not the way it [the news] should have been given and I apologise to each of you," he said. It had been the worst day of his 34-year police career.

He told the commission everyone involved in the operation did their best to bring the men home. "We all worked extremely well together and we are all extremely disappointed that we have not been able to achieve that goal."

The commission also heard from Australian mine gas experts that unsafe gas levels at the mine meant there was never a window of opportunity to rescue the men.

One of those experts, New South Wales Mines Rescue Service state manager Seamus Devlin testified that he supported the decision not to re-enter the mine: "In my opinion, the decision not to send personnel underground in a search and rescue operation was correct in light of the lack

of information available regarding the atmospheric conditions underground."

Devlin said he believed the 29 men would have died within an hour of the first explosion.

Monday 19 September 2011

Welsh mining disaster: services held to pay tribute to miners

Extract from The Telegraph, UK

Church services will be held across Wales today for the four men killed in the Welsh mining tragedy, as an appeal fund for the families raises £20,000 in its first day.

Prayers will be said for the men, who all died when the shaft they were working in flooded at the Gleision Colliery, as an investigation continues into the cause of the disaster.

The small community has been left bereft by the deaths of Phillip Hill, 45, Charles Breslin, 62, David Powell, 50, and Garry Jenkins, 39, whose bodies were discovered on Friday after a massive search and rescue effort.

Neath MP Peter Hain set up the Swansea Valley Miners Appeal Fund, and last night tweeted: "We've done it! £20k in first day for Swansea Valley Miners appeal. Thanks to everyone for their support."

Earlier, he described the incident as the "worst mining accident Wales has seen for generations", which was "a stab through the heart of the community".

On the minersappealfund.org website, Mr Hain said the bereaved families "need our help to survive and recover in the future".

Floral tributes were laid near the scene of the tragedy, including a poignant message from Phillip Hill's daughter Kyla.

The card she laid was as simple as it was touching. It read: "Hi dad, I love and miss you forever. Love you all the money in the world and America. From Kyla x"

Another card from Mr Hill's family said: "Thank you for being part of our lives. Our girls will be safe with me. Miss you always. Donna x Meg"

The family also left a third bunch of flowers and another card, which said: "Phil, Kyla and Meg are in good hands, so sleep tight.

"Love Sadie and Brett xxx".

They were sentiments that reflected the immense grief that has struck the mining communities of south Wales, where Peter Hain, the MP for Neath, said the tragedy had "stabbed through the heart of the community".

Among the other well-wishers leaving tributes to the four men were the widow and daughters of Alan Jones, a miner killed underground in 1976.

On a card they wrote: "To the families of miners lost.

"May you find courage and strength over the coming days, months and years ahead. Our sincere sympathy and our thoughts are with you.

"From the wife and daughters of Alan Jones (killed in Blaenant Colliery, Crynant, 1976)"

Another tribute said: "The day's work is done, your tools are 'on the bar'. No more sweat and no more pain. Rest in peace."

One card said simply: "Rest in peace boys. Wales is proud of you xxxx"

Mr Hain last night launched an appeal to help the families of the four men, now left without the support of their principal breadwinners.

The alarm was raised early on Thursday after the shaft at Gleision was flooded, trapping the men. It had been hoped that the miners – originally part of a group of seven – might have found refuge in an air pocket following the accident.

But those hopes were gradually dashed on Friday, despite frantic efforts to rescue the men, with the police announcing at 6pm that the body of the last of the four had been found.

In a joint statement, the Wales Office and the Health and Safety Executive said an investigation has been launched.

"Following the tragic incident at Gleision Colliery on September 15, an investigation is now under way," the statement said. "HSE specialist mine inspectors are on site. They are working closely with South Wales Police, who are leading the investigation and have appointed a senior investigating officer.

"When an investigation into the incident begins, initially the police will have primacy in accordance with the Work-Related Deaths Protocol agreed between the police, HSE, local authorities and the Crown Prosecution Service and HSE will provide technical support.

"At a later point it may be deemed appropriate for primacy of the investigation to be passed to HSE, as has happened in other incidents."

Swansea City Football Club held a minute's silence for the miners who lost their lives in the tragedy before the team's Premier League game against West Bromwich Albion at the Liberty Stadium in Swansea.

The club's chairman, Huw Jenkins, described the disaster as a "dreadful tragedy which has affected the whole community", adding: "Our sympathy goes out to the families who have lost loved ones in extremely sad circumstances."

Messages of support have poured in from around the world, with well-wishers everywhere praying for some good news until the final death was announced.

David Cameron described the tragedy as a "desperately, desperately sad situation".

To donate to the Swansea Valley Miners Appeal: <http://www.minersappealfund.org/>

NZ: Pike 'agony' mirrored in Wales

Extract from stuff.co.nz



Justice Panckhurst says the Welsh tragedy has parallels with Pike River. Photo - John Kirk-Anderson

The man heading the inquiry into the Pike River disaster has expressed his sympathy for the families of the miners killed in Wales.

Commissioner Graham Panckhurst told the inquiry this morning the parallels between the Welsh tragedy, where four miners died last week, and Pike River were apparent.

Both had the "agony" of a search and rescue, followed by confirmation that lives were lost, he said.

The second phase of the Pike River inquiry started in Greymouth this morning. It is now in its third week.

Jim Stuart-Black, of the New Zealand Fire Service is now giving evidence to the inquiry.

Stuart-Black is the national manager of special operations for the New Zealand Fire Service.

He is expected to be followed by former Pike River statutory manager Steve Ellis, Lesley Haines from the Department of Labour, New Zealand Mines Rescue manager Trevor Watts, and Craig Smith from Solid Energy.

Seven relatives of the Pike River victims will then appear, followed by Pike River CEO Peter Whittall.

Tuesday 20 September 2011

Trapped miners: a history of mining accidents

Extract from The Telegraph, UK

Accidents are rare in Britain these days but around the world the mining industry is not without risk.

The Senghenydd colliery disaster, when 439 miners were killed in a gas explosion was the worst accident in British mining history.

That was in October 1913 and an improvement in safety conditions and the decline of the industry since means that fatalities and accidents are far less common.

But seven people have been killed in mining accidents since 2006, according to Health and Safety Executive statistics.

Around the world, there have been several high profile mining accidents in recent years.

In November 2009, 108 Chinese people died after an explosion in Xinxing mine near Hegang in Heilongjiang province but the majority of the 500 or so miners were rescued.

An underground explosion in April last year at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia, US, killed 29 and was the country's worst mining accident in 40 years.

Then in August of that year, 33 Chilean miners were trapped in Copiapo mine after a cave-in.

In a tale of hope which attracted worldwide attention, the miners were rescued after surviving 69 days at the bottom of the mine, 2,300ft (700m) below the surface.

But in November last year, fresh disaster struck, this time in New Zealand where an explosion in the Pike River mine killed 29 people. Two escaped with minor injuries.

QLD: In memory of our lost miners

Extract from www.northweststar.com.au

MINERS past and present gathered alongside dignitaries from state and local government yesterday to remember those who have died in accidents across Queensland's history.

More than 1450 people have died in mining accidents in Queensland, 171 in the North West Mineral Province, since exploration began.

Australian Workers Union representative Hag Harrison said each miner lost was a huge blow to the community.



TRIBUTE: Mines Minister Stirling Hinchliffe pays his respect to miners killed in workplace accidents. -Picture: JANE HATZL/3421

"No amount of mining revenue can replace or regain what they have lost," he said.

"Each statistic represents a person."

Xstrata Mount Isa Mines mine rescue supervisor Ron Pippenbacher reflected on the loss of his father in a mining accident 25 years ago.

Mr Pippenbacher's father Joseph, who emigrated to Australia from Austria in 1956 to make his fortune in the mines, was killed in a mud rush in 1986, shortly after the younger Pippenbacher took a job with mines rescue.

"My mother wanted me to turn my back on the mining industry," Mr Pippenbacher said. "But I didn't see that as the answer."

Mr Pippenbacher said he had seen some "dark days" in his 26 years in mines rescue, but his resolve to prevent others from feeling the pain his family was forced to feel after the death of his father was stronger than ever.

Mines Minister Stirling Hinchliffe paid his respects to workers who died in accidents in the distant past, such as the 75 who died 90 years ago in the Mount Milligan disaster, and those who perished more recently, in particular the victims of the Pike River mine disaster last year.

The New Zealand Pike River accident claimed the lives of 29 workers including two Queenslanders.

Mr Hinchliffe paid tribute to the sacrifice of miners and mining families.

"In the dust and in the darkness they went about securing our economic future," he said.

"Their passing brings a greater level of diligence."

Where was MSHA at the Lucky Friday Mine?

Extract from blogs.wvgazette.com, Coal Tattoo (blog)

Regular readers of Coal Tattoo will recall the untimely death of 53-year-old Larry Marek, a miner at the Lucky Friday silver mine in Idaho back in April.

Well, thanks to reporter Jessica Robinson of Northwest News Network, we're finding out much more about what led up to Marek's death.



President Barack Obama, flanked by Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health Joe Main, speaks about mine safety, Thursday, April

15, 2010, in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

Check out what she's reporting:

It's been five months since a rockfall at the Lucky Friday Mine in north Idaho killed veteran miner Larry Marek. Much about the accident is still unknown. But public records going back several years suggest the federal agency that oversees mines did not adequately ensure the safety of workers at the Lucky Friday. A 2008 report on another collapse there went missing. And since Larry Marek's death, inspectors have found a dramatically higher number of safety violations.

Jessica found that, at the time of his death, Marek was working in an unusually wide stope, or opening where miners extract the silver ore. This stope was located near an intersection of veins, a spot where the roof can easily become unstable. As Jessica reported:

In fact, a wide stope and an unstable wedge of rock had been factors in a collapse at the Lucky Friday Mine before, but no one was there. It was in 2008, three years before Larry Marek's death. According to a federal report on the fall, "Had it occurred a few hours earlier or later, it is likely that a fatality or fatalities could have resulted."

... The 2008 incident involved intersecting faults, not veins. But the federal geologist who wrote the report made recommendations to address a couple of key points that are relevant to Larry Marek's death. The report recommended the mine keep stopes narrow and reinforce unstable rocks like the ones created at intersecting veins and faults. Those are the "acrobats" that Brady referred to.

But it appears the 2008 report was never given to the mining company.

"We had not seen this report prior to when you provided it to us," Hecla spokeswoman Melanie Hennessey told me.



Sound familiar? Remember how MSHA officials couldn't seem to figure out whether Massey had followed agency recommendations for dealing with previous methane gas "outbursts" prior to the Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster here in West Virginia?

Well, read on to see what else Jessica found:

... Federal mining inspectors have found a lot of safety violations at the Lucky Friday Mine since the rockfall that killed Larry Marek. Two months after the accident MSHA inspectors found 70 health and safety violations. The month before, they found eight.

Celeste Monforton is a former MSHA policy adviser. She notes that in March, before the accident, two inspectors spent 46 hours at the Lucky Friday Mine during the routine inspection. After the accident in June, five inspectors spent more than 300 hours.

"And when I see something like that, one can't help but wonder whether whether those deficiencies existed on the previous inspection and they just weren't observed," says Monforton.

Boy, that sure sounded familiar to me ... It especially reminded me of questions I dug into after two workers died (subscription required) in a surface mine collapse near Barton, Md., a few years back:

The Maryland strip mine where two workers have been buried this week by a highwall collapse has a compliance record that some safety experts say appears too good to be true.

Over the last three years, federal inspectors have cited just eight violations at Tri-Star Mining's Job No. 3 near Barton.

That's a fraction of the average citations received by similarly sized surface mines over the same period, according to federal data.

And at the same time, Tri-Star reported an accident rate that was worse than the national average in two of the last three years, according to U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration data.

"You have to question whether or not the inspections were adequate," said Davitt McAteer, a longtime mine safety expert who ran MSHA during the Clinton administration.

What does MSHA have to say for itself about the Lucky Mine?

We contacted MSHA to pose that question to them. A spokeswoman said no one was available to do an interview. In an email she wrote, "all we can say is, when an inspector finds a violation, he cites that violation."

As for Larry Marek and his grieving family:

In all the attention to the Lucky Friday Mine, Larry Marek's family has stayed largely silent, until recently. His daughter Hayley wrote online that she believes unsafe conditions at the mine led to her father's death.

USA: Couple sues Speed Mining for work-related injury

Extract from The West Virginia Record

CHARLESTON -- A man and his wife are suing Speed Mining for injuries sustained during a work-related accident.

On Sept. 4, 2010, Shawn P. Grady, who was employed by Raleigh Industrial Mine Supply, was working at the American Eagle mine, which was operated by Speed Mining, according to a complaint filed Aug. 29 in Kanawha Circuit Court.

Grady claims he and two co-workers boarded a two person man-tub to travel outside at the conclusion of their shift after their supervisor obtained clearance to proceed from a Speed Mining employee.

During the course of the trip, Grady was seated on the outside frame of the man-tub and his two co-workers occupied the two available seats, according to the suit, but, despite having clearance, a locomotive operated by Speed Mining employees negligently, carelessly and recklessly ran a switch and proceeded through the rolled up doors and collided with the man-tub.

Grady claims the force of the collision threw him from the man-tub, causing him severe and permanent injuries.

Speed Mining owed a duty to provide coal miners a safe workplace and failed to do so, according to the suit.

Grady claims the defendant breached its duty by failing to ensure that the route traveled was clear and free from other traffic and mining equipment.

Speed Mining also negligently breached its duty by requiring Grady to travel in a man-tub with two co-workers when the man-tub was only designed to carry two people, according to the suit.

Grady and his wife, Jodi Grady, are seeking compensatory damages with pre- and post-judgment interest. They are being represented by Timothy C. Bailey and J. Ryan Stewart.

The case has been assigned to Circuit Judge Charles E. King.

Wednesday 21 September 2011

Pike River: Labour Dept 'conflict'

Extract from stuff.co.nz

The Department of Labour has faced heavy questioning over its role in allowing the "non-compliant" Pike River mine to operate.

Lesley Haines, deputy chief executive, labour group for the Department of Labour, has resumed giving evidence to the Pike River inquiry this morning.

John Haigh, lawyer for Pike River former general manager Doug White, attempted to question Haines over the Department of Labour mines inspector, who had authorised Pike River to use its 108m ventilation shaft as a second emergency exit.

Haigh told the inquiry the Department of Labour was deciding who should be prosecuted over the 29 deaths and suggested the department's inspector was in the prosecution "firing line" for this authorisation.

However, he was not allowed to ask the question by Commissioner Graham Panckhurst, who said the issue was not relevant to the inquiry.

Under questioning from Nigel Hampton, lawyer for the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), Haines agreed the department had a "conflict" in its roles.

The Department of Labour was currently looking at its own role and responsibility of its coal mining inspectors who had allowed the "non compliant" Pike River mine to operate, Hampton said.

"Do you understand the magnitude of the possible conflict of interest here where you had an explosion where 29 men died?," he said.

"You're looking at your own," Hampton told Haines.

Haines said the department had commissioned a number of external reviews of the work of its mine inspectors at Pike River, and the department's role advising the government on appropriate regulation and policy.

A new chief mine inspector will be installed at the department, Haines said.

Pictured for the first time: All four miners killed in the Wales pit tragedy

Extract from www.dailymail.co.uk

- **Police to investigate Facebook hate page mocking four miners**
- **Families pay tribute accident victims David Powell, Charles Breslin, Phillip Hill, and Garry Jenkins**
- **Pit owner 'was prosecuted' for fly-tipping and selling sub-standard coal**
- **Investigators enter mineshaft to establish cause of the fatal flash flood**

These are the four miners who were killed in the pit tragedy that devastated a community last week.

Pictured together for the first time, David Powell, 50, Charles Breslin, 62, Phillip Hill, 45, and Garry Jenkins, 39, died after a flash flood in the narrow mineshaft.

The investigation into the accident at Gleision Colliery in the Swansea Valley which left four dead is expected to focus on concerns over safety levels inside the colliery.

As police prepare to probe the mine owner Gerry Ward, 47, it has been reported that he was previously prosecuted for fly-tipping and, in 2002, for passing off low-quality coal as high-quality.

The revelation came as an investigation was launched into a shocking Facebook page that mocked the fate of the four men and families paid tribute to the 'proud miners'.



Charles Breslin, 62, (left) was killed alongside Phillip Hill, 45, (right) and two other miners in the accident at Gleision Colliery last week



David Powell, 50, (left) lost his life in the tragedy. Garry Jenkins was killed in the accident

Police received numerous complaints from members of the public who called for action to get the page taken down and a union official condemned the site as 'thoroughly sick'.

The Facebook site, which took the form of an online hate campaign targeting the Welsh with racial slurs and trivialising the tragic deaths, appeared to be the work of one person.

One comment read: 'In a boost to the failing jobs market in South Wales, 4 new vacancies have been created in the Swansea area from Monday!'

'I hope they catch the people responsible for this as quickly as possible. It is thoroughly sick,' said Ian Morgan, an National Union of Miners official based in the Rhondda Valley.

'Facebook is not the sort of thing I get involved in but whoever is behind this deserves to be arrested and punished in court with the full force of the law.

'I hope they are caught quickly and I urge the police to act with rapidity.'

A spokesman for the South Wales Police confirmed that a significant number of complaints about the site had been received and it was now under investigation.

According to the BBC, Facebook has taken down what it called an offensive page and removed the profiles of its creators.

A Facebook spokesman told the broadcaster: 'Online and off, a tiny minority of people are intent on causing offence to others.

'At Facebook, we have built rigorous reporting tools that enable people to



Tributes: Flowers line the street as local people leave notes for the four dead miners left at Cilybebyll near Pontardawe, south Wales



Grieving: Families of the miners are calling for the pit to be shut down and sealed up for ever once the investigation is complete

Relatives of the miners have today paid tribute to the 'happy and hard-working' family men.

The families told of the most 'harrowing' time of their lives as they waited with 'increasingly dwindling hope' as rescuers battled to reach them.

They said the men were 'proud miners' thanked the rescue teams who risked their own lives in a vain bid to pull them out of the pit.

The most poignant tribute came from Garry's seven-year-old son Alex who said: 'Dad was a great darter and a motorbike rider but most of all he was a great dad.'

'I am going to miss him, he will always be loved.'

Garry's family said he was always happy, hard working and never without a smile on his face. His relatives said: 'He would help anybody he could in any way.'

'He lived life to the full enjoying his caravanning and following his family and supporting them in their motocross racing.'

'His other passion was playing darts with his good mates at his local.'

Relatives of Philip Hill revealed it is the third tragedy to hit the family - his son Simon and mother Merle both died within the last 10 months.

A family spokesman said: 'We wish to thank the Mines Rescue teams who worked tirelessly to bring our Philip home safely but sadly in vain.'

'Their efforts have not gone unnoticed and without their continual hard work throughout the rescue attempt we would not have our Philip home to allow us to grieve.'

The family also thanked the Red Cross, WRVS volunteers and local shops who donated food and supplies during the 36-hour rescue attempt.

Miner Charles Breslin was due to retire but loved the work and comradeship so much he carried on working.

The father and grandfather amazed men half his age by managing to shovel 20 tons of coal a day at the small hillside pit.

His wife Mavis, 60, said in a statement: 'The terrible accident which robbed Charles of his life has left the whole family without a husband, father and brother.'

'The many hours of waiting, with increasingly dwindling hope alongside the families of the other trapped miners were the most harrowing of our lives.'

'The dedication and commitment from the emergency services were very much appreciated by all concerned.'



Church services across South Wales paid tribute to Phillip Hill, Garry Jenkins, David Powell, and Charles Breslin. The Archbishop of Wales Dr Barry Morgan said the tragedy had moved an entire nation and the world

'No one could have done more as they bravely raced against the clock and put their own lives in danger. Their bravery should be rewarded.'

Keen fisherman Charles was Vice Chairman of the Ystalyfera Royal British Legion and had been a member of Territorial Army.

He and Mavis had just completed building their own dream home in the village of Cwmllynfell, four miles from the pit where he died.

Mavis added: 'He never had a bad word to say about anyone. He had been a coal miner for most of his working life, a job which his father had done before him, and had worked at most of the small mines in the area during his life.'

'The whole family appreciate the many messages of condolences from people who knew Charles, as well as from many sympathisers who had not known him but had we felt shared in our long vigil during rescue efforts.'

The family of pit maintenance manager David Powell said: 'He was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather, son and true friend.'

'Dai was a proud colliery, our life and soul. He brought joy and fun to everyone he met.'

Father-of-four Mr Powell was very proud that his son Daniel, 26, followed him down the pit. Daniel was one of the three survivors of last week's tragic flash flood at the small private mine.

Meanwhile, investigators entered the mineshaft for yesterday as they seek to establish the causes of the accident. Police are also preparing to interview the pit owner.

A spokesman said the team 'will draw on technical expertise', with specialist mine inspectors working closely with South Wales Police. Key to their investigations will be statements from survivors.



Two miners covered in coal dust sit and reflect on the tragedy that has rocked the small mining community

Mr Powell's son Daniel, 26, was carrying equipment with Mark Lloyd, 45, a short distance away from the point where torrents of water filled the narrow tunnels. Both men escaped unharmed.

Mine manager Malcolm Fyfield, 56, who crawled out of a narrow ventilation shaft, was still fighting for his life in hospital yesterday.

There have been calls for the pit to be shut and sealed once the investigation is complete.

A friend of the Powell family said: 'They want to see the pit shut down for good – they don't want anyone else to go through the nightmare they have suffered.'

It is thought the men were drilling without knowing that thousands of gallons of trapped rainwater were on the other side of the coal seam.

Prayers were said in church services across Wales at the weekend, while a fund to offer financial support to the grieving families, supported by Prince Charles, has raised more than £50,000.

Among tributes left at St John the Evangelist church in Cilybebyll – the closest village to the scene of the disaster – was one from Mr Hill's eldest daughter Kyla, 11. She placed a bouquet of flowers with a card on which she had written: 'Hi dad, I love and miss you forever.'



A service is held at St. John the Evangelist church in Cilybebyll, where thoughts and prayers were given for the injured and dead miners. Right, resident look at floral tributes on a small road junction close to Gleision Colliery

Her mother Donna, Mr Hill's widow, left a note which said: 'Thank you for being part of our lives. Our girls will be safe with me. Miss you always.'

Mr Ward's firm, MNS Mining Ltd, said in a statement that it was 'totally devastated about everything that has happened', adding: 'Our thoughts are with the families.'

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BACK PRIMED

When the priming charge of a shot is placed at the back or bottom of the shothole.

-Ed