



# Mining Accident News No.1129

22 to 30 September 2011

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Thursday 22 September 2011

## Two dead in Colombia coal mine explosion: official

*Extract from MarketWatch, USA*

BOGOTA -- Two miners died, three more were wounded and several more could be trapped underground in a coal mining explosion in Colombia, the latest tragedy in a series of deadly mining accidents.

Fabian Morales, the head of rescue operations at mining regulator Ingeominas, said the accident was apparently the result of an explosion of methane gas in a coal mine located in the department of Boyaca, near Bogota.

Morales added that the rescue team had yet been unable to determine how many other miners had been trapped by the explosion. So far this year, 106 workers have died in mining accidents in Colombia.

Colombia is the world's fifth-largest coal exporter and its production destined for abroad is controlled by foreign companies including Alabama-based Drummond Co., Glencore International AG, BHP Billiton Ltd. and Xstrata PLC, which operate in open-pit coal mines.

But most of the deadly mining accidents in Colombia occur in small, underground coal mines operated by individuals or small local companies that have few safety procedures in place. The output from most of these mines is destined for the domestic market.

## USA: Ex-W.Va. miner sentenced for fake credentials

*Extract from Houston Chronicle*

BECKLEY, W.Va. — A former Massey Energy employee has been sentenced for faking a foreman's license and lying to investigators.

The Charleston Gazette says a federal judge in Beckley sentenced Thomas Harrah of Seth to 10 months in jail Thursday.

Harrah had pleaded guilty in April to making a false statement on a federal mine safety inspection document. He also admitted to lying to federal investigators.

Harrah was accused of conducting numerous safety examinations at Massey's Upper Big Branch mine in 2008 and 2009 while using a phony state mine foreman's certification number.

Harrah didn't work at the mine at the time of a 2010 explosion that killed 29 miners. Prosecutors have said his crimes were uncovered as part of an investigation of the explosion.

**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 29 of 2011

Alpha Natural Resources acquired Massey in June.

Saturday 24 September 2011

## **Wales: Probe into tragedy at Gleision will take weeks**

*Extract from [www.thisissouthwales.co.uk](http://www.thisissouthwales.co.uk)*

THE probe into last week's Swansea Valley mining accident which left four men dead could last for another 12 weeks.

Post-mortems have been completed on Philip Hill, 44, Charles Breslin, 62, Dai Powell, 50 and Garry Jenkins, 39, who died after becoming trapped in the Gleision drift mine in Cilybebyll.

They confirmed "all four men were exposed to flooded pit contents under pressure".

But specific information on exactly how each died will only be known after more investigations. It has now emerged that could take anything between 8 and 12 weeks to complete.

Detective Chief Inspector Dorian Lloyd said the probe into their deaths was likely to continue for some time.

He said: "The aim of this investigation is to understand with certainty the circumstances that led to this tragic event. We want to establish how it happened, why it happened and whether there were any influencing factors. This will be a protracted and complex process, but we will do everything possible to find out how these four men lost their lives."

More than 200 rescuers were involved over two days in trying to reach the miners after the alarm was first raised on the morning of September 15.

There were hopes at first they might have survived the flooding of the mine by sheltering in a pocket of air. But hopes quickly faded after the first body was located.

South Wales Police is now working with the Health and Safety Executive to determine the circumstances which lead to the accident.

Specialist mine inspectors are still working at the scene and are expected to remain on site for at least a further two weeks.

Their work includes accessing the area where the miners were working at the time of the incident.

Police said specific information on each of the victims would be known following further investigation.

Inquests into each of the four deaths will be opened on Tuesday afternoon.

Police said funeral details of the four men would also be announced shortly.

Meanwhile, the Swansea Valley Miners Appeal Fund, set up to help the families of those who died, has now topped £150,000.

Neath MP Peter Hain, who helped organise the appeal, yesterday updated the total on social networking website Twitter adding: "Miners appeal so far raised £80,000 online, and £70,000 to my Neath Office.

"Incredible — many thanks".

He also revealed rockers Manic Street Preachers had promised a "substantial" donation to the fund, while Chelsea Football Club were today making their own contribution.

The Premier League giants, who host the Swans at their London home of Stamford Bridge, are holding a bucket collection and raffle in their corporate area, as well as making a donation of their own.

## NZ: Mine boss 'devastated' by criticism

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



SAD NEWS: Peter Whittall was telling the Royal Commission about breaking the news to the families that their loved ones were dead following the second blast at the mine, when he burst into tears. Photo: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON/The Press

Pike River Coal chief executive Peter Whittall has told the families of the 29 mine victims he is "devastated" by their criticism.

The second phase of the Pike River royal commission of inquiry ended in Greymouth yesterday.

Whittall was the final witness in the three-week inquiry, which heard testimony from 26 witnesses, including seven Pike River family members and Superintendent Gary Knowles, the incident controller.

In harrowing testimony yesterday, Whittall said he had read the statements the families had submitted to the inquiry.

"To say I was fairly devastated would be an understatement. I read them them in disbelief," he said. "I was upset that I thought that anyone could believe that I'd let them down in any way or not given them absolute truth all the way through."

Whittall answered accusations that he had given the families false hope after the first explosion, on November 19 last year, saying he had no motivation to do this.

"If anyone had their tragic suffering made worse by thinking that I was giving false hope, or the fact that I could've given a different story to what

I genuinely believed myself, then I'm absolutely sorry that anyone else ever felt that."

Whittall cried as he described the "horrendous" meeting where he broke the news that all 29 men were dead after the second explosion on November 24.

He was given time to compose himself. His lawyer, Stacey Shortall, comforted Whittall in the witness stand.

He told the inquiry he had wanted to tell the families because it was his responsibility, and he had regretted the delivery – in which the families mistook his words as good news – for 10 months.

"My regret is that anyone could at any stage believe that I had anything other than the best intentions to tell the truth at all stages and to give the families all the support I could possibly do," he said.

Nicholas Davidson, lawyer for the Pike River families, told the inquiry the way the news of the deaths was given to the families was "the most insensitive thing that could be done to them".

Under questioning, Whittall agreed there was only ever a "faint hope" any of the 29 men were alive and waiting for rescue.

Any survivors would have needed to barricade themselves in the upper reaches of the mine before constructing a brattice shield and sucking air from a compressed air line, he said.

Davidson said this "didn't add up" and was an extremely unlikely scenario.

Whittall said he had been unaware a fire was burning in the mine, because Pike River managers, police and experts working at the mine after the first explosion had not told him. He said he learnt of the fire during the inquiry.

"[It's] quite embarrassing, if nothing else, and downright extraordinary that it never got to me, absolutely. I have no idea why that was never raised. It was extraordinary that I should learn

about it in this commission and no time before that – extraordinary."

Bernie Monk, spokesman for the families, said after the inquiry yesterday that he did not blame Whittall for the communication failures, but the families had been "shortchanged" on information.

"He doesn't have to apologise to anyone at this stage because all the evidence is not out in the arena to find out what he's got to apologise for," Monk said. "Everyone [at Pike River] should have been working harder to bring everything to the open. I'm not going to put the blame on anyone. We weren't blaming anyone today. All we wanted to do is get everything out into the open."

Phase three of the inquiry will begin on November 14.

### Quote of the week



"One must always maintain one's connection to the past and yet ceaselessly pull away from it."

Gaston Bachelard  
French Philosopher (1884-1962)

Sunday 25 September 2011

## 5 Dead, 2 Injured in Mine Shaft Collapse in SW China

*Extract from Xinhua*

Five people have been confirmed dead and another two injured after a cave-in in a coal mine shaft Saturday in southwest China's Yunnan Province, the local government said Sunday.

The accident happened at 3:19 p.m. Saturday in a pit of the Yunwei Group affiliated to the

Yunnan Coal Chemical Industry Group Co., Ltd. in the Qilin District of Qujing City.

Seven miners were trapped underground and another 16 escaped after the accident happened, said an official with the Qilin District.

As of early Sunday morning, rescuers had retrieved five bodies. Another two rescued miners were in hospital but their injuries were not life threatening, he said.

The cause of the accident is still under investigation.

## NZ: Police watching evidence at Pike River commission

*Extract from www.stuff.co.nz*

Police say a decision on whether to lay criminal charges in relation to the deaths of 29 men at the Pike River coal mine will not be made until the Royal Commission of Inquiry has wrapped up its investigation.

The commission has been holding hearings in Greymouth to probe the cause of last year's mining tragedy, but police have also been investigating what went wrong at the mine to determine whether criminal charges should be laid.

After the deaths of 14 people at Cave Creek in 1995, police considered laying criminal negligence charges against Department of Conservation staff responsible for building the viewing platform which collapsed. In the end, no one was prosecuted, even though a senior investigating officer recommended charges.

A police spokeswoman declined to comment on the status of the Pike River investigation but indicated police were waiting to see what evidence came to light during the commission of inquiry before making a decision.

Last week the commission, which is part-way through the second phase of its investigation, heard evidence from the families of the 29 men killed. During a public hearing in Greymouth they spoke of how mine boss Peter Whittall gave

them false hope after the initial explosion that their loved ones could still be alive.

Bernie Monk, whose son Michael, 23, was killed, said the families should have been told that a fire was burning underground and that gas levels were not survivable. "If we had the truth, we would have been able to prepare for what lay ahead."

Carol Rose, mother of miner Stuart Mudge, 31, said it had been "cruel" of the company to raise false hope.

Earlier in the week Mines Rescue Service general manager Trevor Watts told the commission there was no opportunity to enter the mine between the first explosion on November 19 and the second five days later. Police and Pike River management were unrealistic in hoping that the men had survived the initial blast, because the mine was small and the first explosion lasted 52 seconds. He said anyone who had survived the blast would have been overcome in minutes by noxious gas or lack of oxygen.

Watts criticised the delays in sealing the mine. Mines Rescue had recommended the move two days after the first explosion, and again immediately after the second, but the Department of Labour rejected it on both occasions. Watts said sealing the mine would have permitted body recovery and protected evidence about the cause of the first explosion.

Late on Thursday Whittall took the stand, defending the use of the mine's 108m ventilation shaft as a second emergency exit. He said the shaft had been designed to be used as an exit for about five years, until a second exit could be developed when the mine extended.

He also defended his failure to act on a suggestion by former Pike River safety manager Neville Rockhouse that a refuge chamber should be installed in the mine.

Whittall was back on the stand on Friday and was reduced to tears as he told the commission about breaking the news to the families that their

loved ones were dead. He said he had spent the past 10 months regretting the way he had handled the situation.

He accused police and other officials of withholding information about the fire inside the mine and said not knowing about it – he learned of it only through the inquiry – contributed to his optimism on the chances there were survivors after the first explosion.

Whittall's testimony ended the second phase of the inquiry. The next will concentrate on what happened at Pike River that caused the underground explosions.

## This week in mining accident history

**30 September 1856**

**Brynmally Colliery**

**Nr. Wrexham, Wales, UK**

**Underground coal mine**

**13 killed, water inrush**

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

Probably sunk in the late 1830's or early 1840's it was purchased by Thomas Clayton and Co. in 1849. It also went by the name of Pwll y Pendwll.

A disaster occurred at the No.3 pit on the 30th September 1856 (Tuesday), when water broke into the pit and 13 lost their lives. The first body was not recovered until 26th Oct 1856.

At the inquest, the Government Inspector "was of mind that the water that inundated Brynmally colliery on the 30th September (1856) came from the old works in the Yord estate".

Inquest result "Accidental Death".

*"8th Oct, 1856 (Wednesday) a Fatal Accident.*

*The pumping apparatus failed during the attempt to find the bodies, When the pump was being repaired, the capstan chain fell on the head of pitman Robert Kendrick( who left a wife and 6 children)".*

The above was taken from the Wrexham and Denbighshire Weekly Advertiser, Oct 11(Saturday), 1856.



Tuesday 27 September 2011

## **Qld: Mining safety top priority**

*Extract from Daily Mercury, Mackay, Qld, Aus*

THE mining industry will make safety a priority this year with several mine safety programs already under way in Australian mines.

Commissioner for Mine Safety Stewart Bell was in Mackay yesterday to give the RACQ-CQ Rescue team a \$25,000 donation from the Queensland mining industry; but the topic soon turned to mine safety.



Commissioner for Mine Safety Stewart Bell

Mr Bell said he was aware of two truck accidents that had occurred in Bowen Basin mines in the last few months.

"We have mine inspectors out on mine sites on a daily basis," Mr Bell said.

"About six months ago we started a couple of programs that were looking at truck brakes... other issues we looked into were due to all the rain we had.

"And we have had people looking into the road surfaces in mines."

Mr Bell said the accident at Goonyella Mine was still under investigation.

A BHP Billiton spokeswoman said the incident had been reported immediately to the mines inspectorate.

"BMA confirms that an incident involving a dump truck occurred on the evening of September 19 at Goonyella Mine," the spokeswoman said.

"The driver was uninjured and immediately reported the incident.

"The incident was also reported to the Mines Inspectorate and an investigation is under way.

"The incident occurred when the rear LH tyres of a loaded dump truck ran over an undetected sub-surface cavity, causing the wheels to sink."

Presenting the \$25,000 to RACQ-CQ Rescue yesterday, Mr Bell said the money had been raised at the Queensland Mining Industry Health and Safety Conference in Townsville.

"Each year the conference chooses a charity to receive the proceeds of the conference's charity auction," he said.

"The mining industry and the wider community are deeply indebted to the RACQ-CQ Rescue helicopter service team who dedicate 24 hours a day, seven days a week to saving lives."

RACQ CQ Rescue general manager Phil Dowler said that the mining industry was a great supporter of the service.

## **S.Africa: Rescuers killed searching for miner**

*Extract from www.news24.com*

Johannesburg - Two rescue workers have been killed while trying to retrieve the body of a miner in Harmony Gold's Evander mine in Mpumalanga, the company said on Tuesday.

A third member of the external rescue team made it back to the surface unhurt. The accident happened on Monday.

"At this stage we don't know what happened, but an investigation is underway today," Harmony spokesperson Marian van der Walt said.

The Harmony miner was believed to be working in the ore pass, a steep and narrow channel used to move equipment and ore up and down the mine, when he was killed.

The rescue team was searching for his body when there was a second accident.

Harmony CEO Graham Briggs expressed condolences to the families and colleagues of the deceased.

All mining had been stopped while the cause of the two accidents was investigated.

"This is very traumatic for everyone," Van der Walt said.

## Latest Indonesia helicopter crash kills two miners

*Extract from Australian Mining*

A helicopter chartered by US giant Newmont Mining has crashed in central Indonesia killing two people.

The accident comes on the back of another crash last month that killed two Australian workers from Newcrest Mining.

Ten workers in total from the Gosowong gold mine in North Sulawesi died in the Newcrest crash, which was blamed on bad weather.

Chartered from Air Fast Indonesia, the Newmont aircraft lost contact two minutes after it took off from the company's mine site, heading for the island of Sumbawa.

The wreckage was located on Monday in a valley on the island.

"The pilot and one passenger were found dead," provincial search and rescue chief Ida Bagus Gde Budisma told AFP.

Another small aircraft transporting supplies to remote villages for a Christian humanitarian association in Papua crashed on Thursday killing its American pilot and two passengers.

An Australian and Slovak pilot were also killed earlier this month when their small aircraft carrying fuel and food to a remote Papua province went down.

## 16 Killed in Marble Mine Blast in Pakistan

*Extract from CRIENGLISH.com*

At least 16 people were killed in a marble mine explosion late Monday night in Pakistan's northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, reported local Urdu TV channel AAJ on Tuesday.

According to the report, the blast took place at a marble mine in the Buhama area of Buner, a mountainous district lying some 110 kilometers northwest of the country's capital Islamabad.

The blast is an accident and exact reason for the explosion is still under investigation, said the report.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has expressed condolence over the loss of the lives in the mine explosion, reported local state-run news agency APP.

Wednesday 28 September 2011

## UK: One dead after Yorkshire mining accident

*Extract from MINING.com*

LONDON — One miner has died while another was rescued alive after an accident at a colliery in North Yorkshire just weeks after the death of four miners in a Welsh pit, the mine operator confirmed.

"UK Coal can confirm a fall of roof occurred at 4:35 pm (1535 GMT) which trapped two of our colleagues," said Gareth Williams, managing director for coal mining for UK Coal, on Tuesday.

"Colleagues successfully recovered one of the two employees trapped by the lower leg. He is now on the surface," he added.

Williams said no names would be released at the moment.

Yorkshire Ambulance Service said emergency crews were sent to the Kellingley Colliery,

outside the town of Knottingley, after receiving an emergency call at 4:51 pm (1551 GMT).

The ambulance service confirmed a hazardous area response team and a specialist team of ambulance staff trained to work underground were sent to the site.

It came less than two weeks after four miners died when they became trapped by flash flooding at the Gleision Colliery in Cilybebyll, south Wales.

The Yorkshire colliery, operated by private firm UK Coal, is the largest remaining deep mine in the county.

Its two main shafts are almost 800 metres (2,600 feet) deep. One shaft is used by miners, while the other transports coal. The pit supplies local power plants and produces some coal for domestic use.

A methane gas leak forced the evacuation of 218 workers from the colliery last year and 46-year-old Ian Cameron died in the mine in 2009 after an equipment failure.

Shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper was visibly upset when she addressed the Labour party conference to inform them there had been an accident in her Pontefract and Castleford constituency.

"There has been an incident at a colliery on the edge of my constituency and there are reports of two miners trapped underground," she told supporters.

She then cut short her speech as her voice began to falter due to the apparent emotion of the events.

Mining accidents are rare in Britain following the rapid decline of the industry in the 1970s and 1980s.

## 4 Rescued in NE China Mine Flood

*Extract from Xinhua*

Four miners were rescued after being trapped for over 31 hours in a flooded mine pit in northwest China's Heilongjiang Province, local authorities said on Wednesday.

The flood occurred around 4:30 a.m. Tuesday in the city of Shuangyashan. Twenty-eight miners were working in the pit when the flood occurred; 22 of them managed to escape, according to a spokesman from the city's work safety supervisory group.

The four rescued miners have been sent to a local hospital and their condition has been described as stable, according to the spokesman.

The remaining two miners perished in the flood; both of their bodies have been recovered, the spokesman said.

The cause of the flood is under investigation.

## NZ: Pike River Mine could be entered by Christmas

*Extract from nzherald.co.nz*

Recovery workers may finally walk up the main tunnel at Pike River Mine by Christmas.

Although Mines Rescue ventured a little way inside the mine several months ago to install a temporary seal no one has been deep inside the mine, where 29 men are entombed, since last November.

Pike River Coal (in receivership) statutory manager Steve Ellis, said today it was hoped that by December the main section of the tunnel as far as the rockfall would become a ventilated, safe area where breathing apparatus would not be needed.

"We have a meeting with Mines Rescue and police on Monday in regards to planning but I



am confident we should have it finished before Christmas," said Mr Ellis.

"We have a temporary seal 70 metres in and Mines Rescue have (already installed) a concrete seal at the 170m point."

Most of the 29 dead are thought to lie behind a large rockfall, more than 2 kilometres in. Pike River hopes to install a special grout close to that fall.

Four robots with cameras used in the wake of the November disaster still remain in the mine and have provided footage up to a depth of 1600m. The only other images have been taken by cameras lowered down boreholes.

The juggernaut that survivor Russell Smith was driving at the time of the blast is located 1570m in.

"Past the 1600m point is unknown territory. There could be other rockfalls we don't know about, twisted metal and the possibility of bodies," Mr Ellis said.

"If this is the case while we are in the process of reclaiming the tunnel we will put up a temporary seal and police and forensics can safely walk into the mine," he said.

New Zealand contractors Webster Drilling and an Australian firm, Wilsons, will commence work in November. A six-inch hole is to be drilled from the surface, and foam - which will rapidly expands upwards - will be pumped into the tunnel, where it will set and seal. Although it has been used overseas, it has never been used in New Zealand.

Receiver Malcolm Hollis of PricewaterhouseCoopers said reclaiming the tunnel also made commercial sense.

"We are happy with the interest we have in the mine. There is international and local interest but that is confidential information. Intended parties will need to have a firm bid on the table at the end of the month - we will then have a far clearer picture of where parties are at."

Mines Rescue said last week it was prepared to start a proper 'reconnaissance' walk in up the tunnel using breathing apparatus. But Mr Ellis said no, due to safety concerns.

He wants to wait until the new grout is installed and the main tunnel reventilated closer to Christmas, so Mines Rescue can enter without breathing apparatus.

New Zealand Oil and Gas is spending \$1.4 million in reclaiming the tunnel to 2.4km.

There are currently no firm plans for how to get past the rockfall into the main area of the mine.

Thursday 29 September 2011

## **NZ: Whittall to leave Pike River Coal**

*Extract from nzherald.co.nz*

Peter Whittall, the face of Pike River Coal, is leaving the company.

Twenty-nine men died in a series of explosions starting last November 19 at the West Coast mine. A Royal Commission of Inquiry is investigating.

Pike River receivers PricewaterhouseCoopers said today Mr Whittall had been kept on to help with the insurance claim and the pending sale of the mine but would finish on November 30.

The receivers recently struck a deal with the coal mine's insurers for a full and final payment of \$80 million, and the sale is at an advanced stage.

Receiver Malcolm Hollis said the chief executive role was surplus to requirements.

The company still has a head office in Wellington but Mr Hollis said it had relocated to far smaller premises with only Mr Whittall and an IT manager based there from this Friday.

Two other staff members, including engineering manager Rob Ridl, would also finish on Friday after resigning, leaving the remaining staff at the mine site north of Greymouth.

Before the explosions, Pike River employed 157 staff plus contractors.

"We will go from 20 to 18 on Friday," Mr Hollis said.

Reducing to 18 staff members was an "ideal" outcome.

"There has been a sinking lid policy as people gradually move on. We had more people than we needed to start with."

Mr Whittall, an Australian, joined Pike River Coal in February 2005 as mine manager, responsible for planning and developing the mine from the turning of the first sod. He reported to former general manager Gordon Ward.

In January 2010, Mr Whittall relocated from Greymouth to the Wellington head office, and in October 2010 was appointed chief executive, after Mr Ward left.

In the weeks after the disaster, after fronting the company to the world media, a Facebook page called 'Peter Whittall is a hero to all New Zealanders' was created.

However, during the Royal Commission of Inquiry in Greymouth last week, he sat apart from the families, who fired severe criticism at him, and he tearfully apologised to them for the way he broke the news of the second, massive explosion.

Police Superintendent Gary Knowles told the inquiry "Mr Whittall fundamentally owned this mine".

"He was Pike River."

Mr Whittall today confirmed that his departure was imminent.

Bernie Monk, a spokesman for the families of the Pike River victims, told APNZ there was "no personal vendetta" against Mr Whittall.

"There's a lot more to Pike River than Peter Whittall," he said.

The families had had nothing to do with Mr Whittall since the company went into receivership.

"Some people might be upset with things, and did say so when they were speaking at the Royal Commission," Mr Monk said.

"But we're leaving it to the commission to sort things out."

Friday 30 September 2011

## **NZ: Pike staff knock off for final time**

*Extract from nzherald.co.nz*

The large majority of Pike River mine workers leave the company today.

The company is in receivership following the disaster almost a year ago that claimed 29 lives.

Among those going is chief executive Peter Whittall, whose employment will end in November.

Receiver Malcolm Hollis says before the explosions, Pike River employed 157 staff, plus contractors.

He says that two thirds of them will be leaving today and that they are people who have left voluntarily and heading off to other employment.

Mr Hollis says after this week there will be 18 people, who will be with the company for another couple of months.

The receivers recently struck a deal with the coal mine's insurers for a settlement of \$80 million and negotiations for the sale of the mine are at an advanced stage.

## **Mining dictionary**

### **A guide to coal mining terminology**

#### **B**

#### **BACKS**

Roof of inclined driveages such as a cross measure drift.

-Ed