



# Mining Accident News No.1130

1 to 20 October 2011

## In this issue:

<b>This week in mining accident history</b> .....	1
China Coal Resumes Output at Two Mines Halted After Deaths.....	2
Fatality "bitter reminder" for UK Coal .....	3
Qld: Miner's actions put others at risk.....	3
13 killed in China mine explosion.....	4
Death toll rises to 17 in China coal mine blast ..	5
<b>Quote of the week</b> .....	5
Co Offaly man dies in Ghana mining accident ..	5
UK: Pit safety 'top priority' .....	5
Chilling details of Cupertino quarry killings.....	6
Philippines: Police rescue Itogon miner after 20 hours.....	8
Anvil reports fatality at DRC Kinsevere project	8
USA: Miner killed in accident.....	9
Former Chinese coal boss gets life in jail for graft.....	9
USA: Mining Industry Becomes Much Safer ...	10
Swansea Valley miners fund hits £400,000.....	10
A year later, Chilean miners' miracle is over ...	11
China: Northeast coal mine owner conceals accident from authorities .....	12
Rhino, Arch cited in two miner deaths.....	12
Miner rescued after pit collapse at South Wales mine .....	12
USA: W. Va. orders emergency mine inspections.....	13
Five die in Dagari coalmine collapse .....	13
USA: MSHA 'Potential Pattern of Violations Status' Contrary to What Law Intended, Attorney Says.....	14
UK: Mining disaster survivor arrested .....	14
USA: Investigation Begins into Miner's Death at Shoemaker Mine .....	15
Gas blast kills eight miners in China .....	15
Canada: Manitoba mine worker dies in accident	16
Albanian miner dies in chrome mine blast .....	16
146 miners trapped underground in Ukraine... ..	17
Four more found dead after gas explosion at southwest China coal mine.....	17
USA: Shutting Off Dangerous Mining Equipment	18

USA: State, feds delayed action on mine shelters.....	19
Mining dictionary.....	22

## This week in mining accident history

**1 October 1930**

**Grove Colliery**

**Brownhills, Staffordshire, England, UK**

**Underground coal mine**

**14 killed, firedamp explosion**

Source: <http://www.dmm-pitwork.org.uk>

### Fourteen men killed in firedamp explosion at the Grove Colliery Pit Disaster

On the 1st October, 1930, fourteen men died underground, as a result of a gas explosion at the Grove, or Brownhills Colliery. It is thought that the men perished when a naked light was struck in the shaft. The excellent site 'Brownhills Past', has the following to say on the subject:

*The Grove Colliery was the site of the worst mining disaster in Brownhills history. An explosion of gas killed fourteen men on the nightshift on 1st of October 1930. The explosion occurred in the shallow coal district, 1.5 miles from the shaft bottom. There was a public inquiry into the accident which returned an open verdict as there was "Not sufficient evidence to prove how the explosion occurred". However it was found that five of the dead men were carrying contraband materials eg. matches and cigarettes, and as electricity and safety lamps were ruled out it was stated that somebody may have struck a light. The Grove was not known as a particularly "gassy" pit and in most parts open lights were allowed. It was also stated that 11 of the men died from carbon monoxide poisoning, and 3 from injuries caused by the blast, 12 of the men may have lived for a while after 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 30 of 2011

The pit was opened in 1857 by William Harrison, who also sunk the Cathedral and Wyrley common pits. The pit closed in 1952.



A turn of the century photo of a distressed shaft at Walsall Wood Colliery. Image taken from 'Coal Mining in Walsall Wood, Brownhills and Aldridge' by Brian Rollins.

This dreadful loss of life was a terrible blow to the town, the comprehensive history of St. James Church speaks of the mourning:

*At 9:18 pm on 1st October 1930 a terrible explosion occurred in the Grove (Brownhills) Colliery beneath the "Fleur De Lys" public house. The funerals of ten of the miners who lost their lives in the disaster took place at St. James Church on 7th October. A solemn procession starting from the Council House made its way along the High Street into Church Road, (lined both sides by the whole of the Ogley Hay and Brownhills community), to the Church where Vicar W.E. Wibby held the funeral service. The miners were laid to rest in a mass grave divided into ten sections in Great Charles Street Graveyard with full military honours as six of the men had fought in the Great War.*



[The graves of the miners killed in the Grove pit disaster.](#)

The 14 men who were killed in the explosion were :-

- Alfred Boden aged 49
- John Brownridge 34
- Ben Corbett 52
- John Hackett 33
- Alfred Heath 27
- Jack Holland 41
- Richard Howdle 30
- Alex Martin 32
- James Malley 33
- William Robbins 45
- John Scoffam 50
- Harry Smith 38
- John Whittaker 44
- William Whittaker 62.

These were dark events, but they were by no means unique; there were huge numbers of men and boys killed or maimed in the course of coal and mineral extraction throughout the Victorian era, right through to the Second World War. Conditions for these hard, determined people gradually improved – but it was not until the social and political upheavals in the early decades of the 20th century that major strides were made in either welfare, healthcare or health and safety. We have the campaigners, socialists and strikers of the period to thank for the legacy they left us, that nearly a century later, not one of us has to accept injury or death at work to be an occupational hazard.

Sunday 2 October 2011

## **China Coal Resumes Output at Two Mines Halted After Deaths**

*Extract from Bloomberg*

China Coal Energy Co. has resumed production at two of five mines that were suspended after flooding killed 10 workers at a site run by its parent.

The mines passed a safety inspection by local authorities in Shanxi province, the company said in a statement to the Hong Kong Stock

Exchange today. Three other sites are starting checks, it said.

Production at the five underground mines was suspended after flooding at a pit run by China National Coal Group Corp., the nation's second-largest coal producer and parent of the listed company, killed 10 people, Xinhua News Agency reported on Sept. 17.

The provincial government ordered a halt, pending "rectification," to underground mines owned by the parent and five underground mines in Shanxi held by the listed unit after the Sept. 16 accident, China Coal said in a Sept. 19 statement.

China Coal shares have dropped 29 percent since the accident, compared with a 10 percent slide in the Hang Seng Index. The suspensions, ordered as power plants prepared to start replenishing coal stockpiles for winter demand for electricity, won't have a material impact on output or the company's operations, according to today's statement.

There had been 512 coal-mine accidents in China as of June, 21 percent fewer than in the same period in 2010, Xinhua reported on June 29. Shanxi produced 740 million tons of coal last year, trailing only the 782 million tons mined by Inner Mongolia, China's top producing province, according to Xinhua in January.

Monday 3 October 2011

## **Fatality "bitter reminder" for UK Coal**

*Extract from Insider Media Limited*

UK Coal has said the fatality at its Kellingley Colliery last week was a "bitter reminder" of its need to improve the company's safety record.

Miner Gerry Gibson, 49, was killed in an accident at the pit last week. A full and independent investigation is underway by the HSE.

The mining business has said it will publish the results of its own investigation into the accident as soon as practicable.

UK Coal, which criticised its own safety record as "unacceptable" in April, has been investigating how to improve its work procedures with the support of external advisers DuPont.

In an update to the Stock Exchange, UK Coal added that a build-up to full production has commenced at Kellingley Colliery following intensive inspections underground since last week's fatality.

## **Qld: Miner's actions put others at risk**

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

FORMER North Goonyella Mine site supervisor Robert Danger has been fined \$15,000 for turning off a methane sensor on an underground load haul vehicle.

Turning off the sensor "exposed himself and other workers to an unacceptable level of risk", Industrial Magistrate Ron Muirhead said in Mackay.

"The underground mining industry is inherently dangerous and those involved in the industry should be able to operate with confidence and have faith in the system to ensure that appropriate safety measures are implemented, monitored and enforced," Mr Muirhead said.

Parliament had allowed for heavy penalties for mining safety breaches and inadequate or light penalties could undermine confidence within the mining industry in the ability of courts to play their part in deterring breaches of safety measures, Mr Muirhead said.

Mr Danger was not authorised to over-ride the methane sensor system and has since lost his employment at that mine.

The Explosive Risk Zone Controller Kevin James Casey, who failed to report the unauthorised use of the override key, has been

fined \$1500 and has also lost his job at the mine.

However, both men have new jobs within the mining industry.

The incident happened about 7.30am on February 4 last year, when a miner was operating a vehicle known as an Eimco underground. It was powered by a diesel engine and had electrical equipment fitted, and at certain levels of methane, both posed an explosion risk, Mr Muirhead said.

The Eimco was fitted with a sensor that would sound a warning alarm when methane reached 1%, and would shut down the engine at 1.25% or above.

The mine had a safety and health management system in place, which specifically stated an Eimco could not operate in an airway in which methane levels of 1.25% or greater were detected in the general air. It also said an Eimco could only be driven "out" of any airway in which methane equaled 1%.

The safety and health management program also said any warnings sounded, or any action taken by an operator in relation to methane, had to be reported to the Explosive Risk Zone Controller and put in an incident report.

The incident in question occurred when the driver noticed the methane reading go past 1% and then the Eimco shut down at 1.25%.

Mr Danger gave him a key to over-ride the shutdown system and the driver continued to work for about 30 minutes. Mr Danger was not authorised to have the override key.

A short time later, Mr Casey was checking methane levels. He saw the Eimco and recorded a level of 1.1%. He thought it unusual the Eimco was operating so pulled it over to make enquiries.

Mr Casey noticed it had been put into bypass mode and established that Mr Danger had overridden the system. He used his key to switch it on and told the driver to exit the area.

The key used to bypass the methane sensor was only authorised to be in the possession of and for the use of explosive risk zone controllers.

After the incident, Mr Casey failed to follow procedures set out in the safety and health management system by failing to make an incident report. Nor did he make a statutory report at the end of the day.

Mr Danger and Mr Casey were charged under the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act. Both pleaded guilty to breaching their safety and health obligations.

Robert James Danger was fined \$15,000 plus \$5000 in investigation costs and \$500 in professional costs.

Kevin James Casey was fined \$1500 plus \$500 in professional costs.

Tuesday 4 October 2011

## **13 killed in China mine explosion**

*Extract from The Sunday Times Newspaper, Sri Lanka*

BEIJING, - At least 13 workers were killed after an explosion in a coal mine in southwestern China on Tuesday, state media said, in the latest mining accident to hit the country.

Another five miners were still missing in the Anping Coal Mine in Guizhou province, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing a local official.

Thirteen miners escaped the blast but three of those died in hospital, the report said.

An investigation into the cause of the accident is under way.

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.

Wednesday 5 October 2011

## Death toll rises to 17 in China coal mine blast

*Extract from Associated Press*

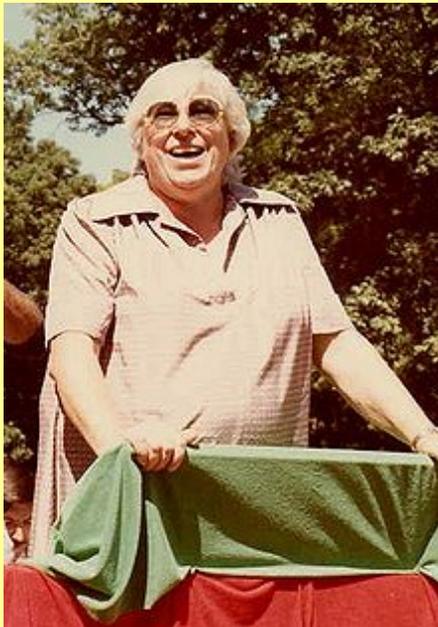
BEIJING — The death toll from a coal mine explosion in southwestern China has risen to 17.

The official Xinhua News Agency says 28 miners were in the shaft when the blast occurred Tuesday in Guizhou province. Eleven were rescued and being treated in a hospital.

Initial reports said 13 miners had died, but three rescued workers later died in a hospital and another body was recovered from the shafts Wednesday morning, bringing the toll to 17.

Xinhua did not give a cause for the blast.

### Quote of the week



"I feel that everyone has a right to be insane."

Madalyn Murray O'Hair  
American writer (1919-1995)

Thursday 6 October 2011

## Co Offaly man dies in Ghana mining accident

*Extract from IrishTimes.com*

A Co Offaly man has died in a mining accident in Ghana.

Seán Egan, a father of two, originally from Edenderry, died within the past couple of days. The Department of Foreign Affairs is providing consular assistance to his family. He is survived by his wife Mary and daughters Shauna and Saoirse.

Fr Philip Smith, parish priest in Ballymore, Co Westmeath, said "he was a great family man, a man of faith".

## UK: Pit safety 'top priority'

*Extract from www.pontefractandcastlefordexpress.co.uk*

BOSSSES at UK Coal say they remain baffled by last week's tragedy at Kellingley Colliery in which miner Gerry Gibson died following a roof collapse.

Andrew Mackintosh, director of communications at the coal mining company, spoke exclusively to the *Express* in the aftermath of the accident as questions of pit safety were raised.

Mr Mackintosh spoke candidly about the third death at the pit in as many years, Kellingley's safety record and the ongoing investigation into the cause of the accident.



He said: "The difficulties of these incidents has meant safety in coal mining has been very much in the news.

"Three deaths is unacceptable. It's hit us all hard because of the efforts that have gone into health and safety at the pit.

"More than £35m has been spent where the accident happened. It's brand new equipment, the coal seam is one of the best Kellingley has ever had in its entire history, which is why the investigation is crucial, to find where things have gone wrong.

"There's no obvious sense as to what caused the accident. We are at a loss, the circumstances looked as though the working conditions were very favourable."

Mr Mackintosh said the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) finished its on-site investigation last week and confirmed it would be around six months before UK Coal received the HSE report.

Carole Cameron, the wife of Ian Cameron – who was killed at the mine in 2009 – has called for the pit's closure, but Mr Mackintosh said pit safety remained a top priority for the company and its production was important not just to the local economy but the entire nation.

He said: "The coal industry is still a very important part of the energy mix nationally. Just as importantly there are hundreds of highly skilled and well paid jobs dependant on the future of the mine locally.

"However, I fully appreciate the comments from Mrs Cameron in what I know has been a very difficult week for her.

He added: "I can reassure families and friends and colleagues working at Kellingley that we work to ensure we have the highest health and safety standards.

"In 1998, there were 37 serious accidents over 100,000 shifts. In 2010, that had dropped to 15. We have more than halved it, which is why this is such a bitter blow to everyone.

"We will carry out a thorough review of every aspect to ensure we can avoid the tragedies we have witnessed from happening again.

"I can reassure everyone that we're absolutely determined to make sure that safety remains a number one priority."

UK Coal appeared at Pontefract Magistrates' Court last Thursday to answer allegations over health and safety checks in relation to Mr Cameron's death. The case was adjourned until October 24 so UK Coal could carry out further investigations.

An inquest into Mr Gibson's death was opened at Selby Magistrates Court on Monday when North Yorkshire coroner Rob Turnbull gave a provisional cause of death as asphyxiation.

## Chilling details of Cupertino quarry killings

*Extract from San Francisco Chronicle*

CUPERTINO -- It was 4:15 a.m. Wednesday and about 15 workers at a Cupertino quarry were getting ready for a routine safety meeting in a company trailer.

Longtime employee Shareef Allman said hi to everyone, grabbed a cup of coffee, then ducked out. Within moments he was back with a .40-caliber handgun and a .223-caliber assault rifle, witnesses say. He fired two shots into the air to grab everyone's attention.

"You think you can f- with me?" Allman, 49, yelled again and again as he methodically shot his colleagues one by one, said Kerry Shaffer, 50, a temporary worker at the Lehigh Southwest Cement Permanente Plant in the foothills of Cupertino who escaped the carnage.

When it was over, three of Allman's co-workers were dead and six others were injured. But the suspect's rampage wasn't finished, authorities say: After driving away from the plant, he shot and wounded a woman whose car he was trying to steal, then eluded an intense manhunt that stretched into Wednesday evening.

### **Neighborhood hunt**

Police from numerous agencies, the FBI and the U.S. Marshal's Service combed a neighborhood on the Cupertino-Sunnyvale border looking for Allman, a San Jose resident who drove a truck for the quarry, where he had worked for 15 years.

The dead were identified as Mark Munoz, 59, of San Jose, Manuel Pinon, 48, of Newman (Stanislaus County) and John Vallejos, 51, of San Jose. Vallejos' brother, Jesse Vallejos, 52, of Gilroy was among the wounded.

"I didn't realize this was reality until I saw bodies on the floor," Shaffer said. "Once he went by me, I knocked some people over and ran out the door. I was gone. Without a doubt, it was the most scary thing that's ever happened in my life."

There was no immediate explanation for the rampage at Lehigh, a limestone-mining operation and cement plant at 24001 Stevens Creek Blvd. But there were theories.

A neighbor of Allman's said he was upset that he had recently been moved to the night shift. Shaffer said the truck driver had been "reprimanded a lot lately because he's been making a lot of mistakes."

### **'Late a lot'**

A shop steward told Shaffer that Allman was involved in "more accidents in the last year or two than people have done over 20 years. He was late a lot, and he kept blaming others."

About three hours after the shooting, Allman tried to take a woman's car at a gas station on Homestead Road near Tantau Avenue about 5 miles east of the plant, then shot and wounded her before running into the surrounding neighborhood, police said.

Allman remained at large Wednesday night, eluding a house-by-house search that included dogs, helicopters and SWAT teams. Authorities have recovered a handgun, a shotgun and two assault rifles from various locations but believe

Allman is still armed, said Santa Clara County Sheriff Laurie Smith, citing surveillance video.

Officers ended their ground search around 7:30 p.m., but Smith said helicopters with thermal vision would be used overnight.

### **Out of character**

Friends of Allman and neighbors at the San Jose apartment complex where he lives described him as religious and outgoing, and expressed shock that he was suspected of gunning down colleagues.

A day before the shooting, however, co-workers noticed that Allman wasn't his usual friendly self.

"He seemed cool until (Tuesday)," said Charles Bryan of Salinas, a truck driver at the quarry. "He was not waving, not acknowledging anybody. Normally he was very outgoing. Everybody noticed it."

The victims' relatives said they had no idea why their loved ones were targets.

Jesse Vallejos' wife, Michelle DeConge, said both brothers were veteran safety leaders at the plant. John Vallejos leaves two children and five grandchildren, she said.

DeConge said she didn't know much about Allman, other than that she had sat next to him at company Christmas parties.

"We really don't know too much," she said. "It's hard to process."

### **Near retirement**

Munoz's sister-in-law, Carmen Rodriguez, said he had been a quarry employee for 20 years and had been looking forward to retiring in three years. He took care of his elderly mother, who has problems walking, and was married to his wife, Viola, for 40 years, Rodriguez said.

Munoz, the father of two, enjoyed restoring old Volkswagens.

"He's a very good person, very family-oriented," Rodriguez said.

Paulette Conner, a neighbor at the apartment complex on Renaissance Drive in San Jose where Allman lives, said he had recently been moved to the 10 p.m.-to-6 a.m. shift at the quarry and "was not happy about it."

Allman has a 20-year-old son and an 18-year-old daughter, and Conner said he had been hoping to spend more time with the daughter.

Conner said she had spoken with the daughter shortly after the shooting.

"She was frantic," Conner said. "It's horrible for her. He's the only parent she knows."

### **Door-to-door search**

Allman's apparent vanishing into a quiet Sunnyvale neighborhood called Birdland - streets have names such as Parrot, Quail and Peacock - led police to block off a perimeter of about 20 square blocks until nighttime.

SWAT officers in camouflage fatigues went door to door, searching homes and backyards. Residents holed up in their homes, and if they left they were not allowed to return. Some officers checked the trunks of cars driving out of the area. Many stores in the area closed early.

"I'm a little worried," said resident Bea Teufel, who was directed to an evacuation center when officers refused to let her go home. "But with so many policemen here, I think it will be OK."

Friday 7 October 2011

## **Philippines: Police rescue Itoyon miner after 20 hours**

*Extract from Sun Star, Baguio, Philippines*

ITOGON, Benguet - Rescuers from government and private sectors of Benguet rescued early Thursday, one small-scale gold miner after a 20-hour rescue operation.

The miner was identified as Agustin Pablo of Tublay, Benguet.

Police Inspector Victor Robert Gaspar, chief of police in this gold mining town, said the alarm of

a miner trapped in a caved-in tunnel in Sitio Siot, Barangay Ampucao, was immediately given by the victim's companions Wednesday night.

"Teams coming from the office of provincial Governor Nestor Fongwan, Rescue 911 of Baguio, Mines and Geosciences Bureau and several others came to the rescue of the trapped miner. When rescuers reached the accident site, Pablo was found alive and was methodically extricated from the cave-in tunnel," Gaspar said.

It was learned that during the last two typhoons, no similar accident happened, as Fongwan ordered law enforcers not to allow the miners enter their tunnels.

Two years ago, nine small-scale miners died when their tunnel was flooded during a strong typhoon. Four survived in that mining accident.

Despite isolated cases of accidents, gold mining remains a viable livelihood in this area.

## **Anvil reports fatality at DRC Kinsevere project**

*Extract from www.mining weekly.com*

PERTH - ASX- and TSX-listed Anvil Mining has reported a fatality at its Kinsevere copper project, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The miner said on Friday that an accident occurred on the mine access road, in which a cyclist was struck by one of the company's water carts performing dust suppression activities.

The relevant authorities have been informed and the company and local police have launched an investigation.

The cyclist was a local villager and not connected with Anvil.

Anvil recently became the takeover target of a \$1.3-billion bid by China's Minmetals Resources. The Chinese company is offering shareholders C\$8 a share.

Kinsevere is Anvil's flagship operation and is expected to produce around 60 000 t/y of copper. The miner is currently studying a further

expansion to between 80 000 t/y and 90 000 t/y, and will announce a decision on this expansion during the latter part of this year.

## **USA: Miner killed in accident**

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

An Eastern Kentucky miner is dead today after an accident early this morning at a mine on Maggard Branch.

It happened at about two a.m. in the Owlco Energy mine behind the Cumberland River Volunteer Fire Department.

This is the fourth mining-related fatality in Kentucky this year.

23-year-old Richard Coots, Jr. of Ages is dead after a mining accident at Owlco Energy in Partridge.

Coots was repairing a conveyor chain when the bridge collapsed on top of him.

"A crushing injury from what is referred to as a bridge inside the coal mine that the belt runs through that has the coal moving to the outside," said Letcher County Deputy Coroner Perry Fowler.

Fowler says nearby miners removed Coots from the rubble.

"His brother was with the crew that brought him out. They were working together in the same area in the mine," said Fowler.

The miners say they performed CPR, but it was too late.

"The apparatus had fallen on him and crushed his upper chest," said Fowler.

The mine is closed while investigators try to determine what caused the accident.

Office of Mine Safety and Licensing officials say they first have to gather preliminary information.

"They go and they make measurements, and they check the physical conditions of the equipment and gather all the physical facts from the accident scene," said Johnny Greene,

Executive Director of the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing.

Greene says witnesses in the mine will be interviewed Saturday.

After officials from the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing sit down with the victim's family and the mining company, the accident report will be public record.

Officials at Owlco Energy say they do not want to comment.

Sunday 9 October 2011

## **Former Chinese coal boss gets life in jail for graft**

*Extract from Reuters India*

A former senior executive at China's No. 3 state-owned coal producer has been sentenced to life imprisonment for accepting bribes, state media Xinhua said on Sunday.

Zhao Shenglong, a former vice-president at Datong Coal Mine Group, was found to have taken two bribes totaling more than 8.29 million yuan (\$1.3 million) between 2000 and 2005, Xinhua said.

Datong is the parent of Shanghai-listed Datong Coal Industry Company Ltd. The company was not immediately available for comment.

Corruption is common in China's political and business arenas. High-profile officials who have fallen from grace after bribery cases include former Shanghai Communist Party Chief Chen Liangyu, and Kang Rixin, the former head of China's main nuclear energy firm.

Widespread corruption has bred resentment among many Chinese, who also feel aggrieved by the pollution and illegal land grabs that accompany China's rapid economic growth.

Tuesday 11 October 2011

## USA: Mining Industry Becomes Much Safer

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

The year 2009 was the safest year in history for mining in the US, according to "Montana Mining 2011." It marks a century-long effort to improve mine safety and a steady decline in accident-related deaths in the industry.

There were 15 fatalities in metal and non-metal mines and 18 in coal mines –a dramatic difference than the beginning of the century when over 2500 miners being killed per year was considered normal. The turning point happened in 1907 after the "deadliest month" in American mining history with over 700 fatalities across the nation. But "there is more work that can and should be done," said the publication.

Despite the record year of 2009, the number of fatalities ticked up again in 2010, with 23 fatalities in metals and non-metals and 48 in coal mines.

Safety is a top priority of the industry with both management and workers striving for improvement. The concerted effort has made the difference.

Where as once mining was considered a very dangerous occupation, 'today, most Americans would be surprised to learn that decades of diligent focus on safety has produced a coal metal and non-metal mining industry that is not even in the top ten 'most dangerous' occupations.' Occupations with greater fatality risks include fishermen, loggers, airline pilots, farmers and ranchers, roofers, ironworkers, sanitation workers, industrial machinists, truckers and drivers/sales workers, and construction workers.



The **21st Electrical Engineering Safety Seminar** will be held at the Waterview Convention Centre, Bicentennial Drive (off Australia Ave), Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 November 2011. A conference dinner will be held on Wednesday evening.

**Registration:**

[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/408415/EESS-2011-Registration-brochure.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/408415/EESS-2011-Registration-brochure.pdf)

Wednesday 12 October 2011

## Swansea Valley miners fund hits £400,000

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

THE fund set up to raise money for the families of the four Welsh miners killed in the Gleision Colliery tragedy has hit nearly 400,000.

Shadow Welsh Secretary Peter Hain is due to reveal the figure during Welsh Questions in the House of Commons when he will also call for the Government to delay its review of health and safety legislation until they receive his submission about the mining accident in his constituency.

Speaking to Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan, Mr Hain will say: "I believe there are a number of important lessons from the Gleision tragedy for the future of mines safety and rescue.

"Can she therefore ensure that the Government delays the Report by Professor Löffstedt, due by the end of this month, on regulations covering mining amongst other sectors, so that account can be taken of a submission I plan for her and her Cabinet colleagues?"

Mr Hain will also make a statement on the tragedy when he will thank various organisations for the role they played and pay tribute to the families of the dead miners.

The miners became trapped when water from old mine workings flooded the colliery on Thursday, September 15.

Their bodies were retrieved the following day after rescuers worked through the night.

Funerals for all four have since taken place.

The Labour MP will say: "At least two coal mines in South Wales, in Aberpergwm and Unity, have been in receipt of inward investment which is growing their employment and output.

"Can I thank both these mines for voluntarily assisting and helping resource the rescue and investigation work following the terrible tragedy

at the Gleision mine in the Swansea Valley which caused the death of four experienced colliers, my constituents Charles Breslin, Philip Hill, Garry Jenkins and David Powell.

"Can I also thank the Secretary of State for her support over this tragedy, including ensuring that – equivalent to the charitable gift aid that could have been claimable – the Government has agreed to provide the 25 per cent uplift to the total raised by the Swansea Valley Miners Appeal Fund; it is now rising towards £400,000: an extraordinary and heartfelt public response.

"Can I also thank the Mines Rescue Service, the Principal Inspector of Mines and the South Wales Police for their dedicated and at times heroic work at Gleision?"

## A year later, Chilean miners' miracle is over

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

Santiago del Chile - A year ago, Chilean miner Jose Ojeda, one of 33 men trapped 700 meters underground, sent the world an optimistic sign of life: 'We are well in the refuge - the 33'.

But the message he released to Chilean media one year after has a different ring.

'We are not well, the 33.'

As Chile and the world look back on the dramatic rescue that brought the men to safety after 70 days under the collapsed San Jose Copiapo mine, many of the men continue to struggle. Ojeda suffers from serious diabetes. Mario Gomez, who worked in mines for more than a half-century, is ill with silicosis, a lung disease that often afflicts miners. The youngest man in the group, Jimmy Sanchez, still can't sleep.

Alberto Iturra, who led the team of psychologists on the rescue, says it's hard to imagine the stress the men suffered.

'Many people still don't understand what it means to be in danger of dying for two and a half months. The physical, emotional, spiritual,

social cost that that takes. If you weren't there, you can't understand, and you're not going to understand,' he told dpa.

Fifteen of the 33 are unemployed. Many remain in psychological treatment. Four have returned to mining.

'They're still not done adjusting to family life, to work life. This is very worrying, that after a year they haven't been able to re-enter a productive working life,' says Iturra.

The rescue last October 13 gripped the nation and the world.

People cheered as the miners in protective dark glasses were pulled one by one out of the earth in the Phoenix 2 rescue capsule, broadcast live on 24-hour news channels.

And even as the men still struggle, their story has taken on the status of legend. They've signed a deal with Hollywood producer Mike Medavoy to tell the story of their ordeal. A miner rescue toy set, with figurines representing the men, a drill and the Phoenix 2, sells for 4,000 pesos (10 dollars) in a Chilean supermarket chain.

But so far, the miners haven't seen the money. Fourteen of the 33 were awarded a disability pension more than a year after the accident, but the fortune that was expected to follow their sudden fame has yet to materialize. The mining company's 1.9-million-dollar debt to the 200 miners left unemployed by the accident was finally paid by the government after the mine went bankrupt.

It's been a hard return to reality for President Sebastian Pinera, too. A year ago, he was riding high on more than 80 per cent approval ratings, driven by the rescue that transfixed Chile and the world. A year later, after four months of student strikes, he's facing the worst ratings of his presidency, the lowest approval of a Chilean government in 20 years.

Despite the lessons of the San Jose Copiapo collapse, mining in Chile remains a hard and

dangerous job. Chilean miners work an average of 51 hours per week. In 2009, the death toll in mines was 5.7 for every 100,000 miners. Chilean authorities say 373 miners died on the job in the last decade.

The most recent was just last Saturday: Wilfredo del Carmen Jimenez, who was killed in a mine accident in Melipilla province, south of Santiago.

Thursday 13 October 2011

## **China: Northeast coal mine owner conceals accident from authorities**

*Extract from Xinhua, China*

BEIJING, -- China's safety watchdog said on Thursday that a mine owner failed to inform local authorities about a Tuesday flood that trapped 13 miners in northeast China's Heilongjiang province.

The local government did not know the accident until it was tipped off by the public, the State Administration of Work Safety said.

The coal mine is located in Jidong County in the city of Jixi. Twenty-four miners were working underground when the accident occurred, with 11 of them managing to escape.

The administration ordered local authorities to do their best to save the remaining trapped miners and conduct a thorough investigation into the cause of the accident.

The administration said other regions should learn from the accident, step up their supervision of mining activities and eliminate risks in order to avoid fatal accidents.

The privately-owned mine is legally licensed and has been operating since 2005.

## **Rhino, Arch cited in two miner deaths**

*Extract from The Charleston Gazette, USA*

Friday 14 October 2011

## **Miner rescued after pit collapse at South Wales mine**

*Extract from www.walesonline.co.uk*

A MINER has been injured in a pit accident just a few miles away from the Swansea Valley colliery where a flood killed four workers last month.

The injured man, 48, was airlifted to hospital after being trapped under rubble following the collapse of a wall in the Unity Mine at Cwmgwrach in the Vale of Neath.

He was rescued by colleagues and treated on the surface by paramedics before being flown to the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff.



Unity Mine at Cwmgwrach, where a miner has been injured in an accident

Ambulance crews called to the scene said they treated the miner for possible broken bones, pelvic and spinal injuries.

No one else was injured in the incident.

Miners from the Unity pit were among the first to join rescue crews last month after the Gleision Colliery accident.

Richard Nugent, a director of the Unity Mine, said: "There was a fall from a side wall in of the headings. One man was injured and at the moment we believe he may or may not have broken a bone.

"He has been taken to hospital where he is undergoing x-rays and checks to ascertain the extent of his injuries but we have been told by the medics his injuries are not life threatening.

"He has been injured on one side of the body where he took the brunt of the fall."

Mr Nugent said operations at the mine have shut for the time being while investigations into what happened take place.

Health and Safety inspectors are already on the scene. They were holding a meeting at the mine offices to discuss the fatal accident last month at the nearby Gleision Colliery in Cilybebyll near Pontardawe.

Mr Nugent said: "The inspectors were here anyway so they started investigating straight away."

Four miners died after a devastating flood tore through the Gleision drift mine on September 15 and the Wales Office, South Wales Police and the Health and Safety Inspectorate are currently investigating.

Funerals have been held for the four who died at Gleision, Charles Breslin, 62, of Cwmllynfell, Philip Hill, 44, of Resolven, Garry Jenkins, 39, of Rhiwfawr and David Powell, 50, of Godre'Graig.

The Swansea Valley Miners Appeal fund established to help the dependents of those who died is "fast approaching" £400,000, said Neath MP Peter Hain who helped launch the appeal.

The Unity mine at Cwmgwrach, had been closed since 1998 but re-opened in 2007 due to rising demand and an increase in the price of coal.

It now employs more than 100 workers and is estimated to have reserves of up to 90 million tonnes of coal.

Unity is a drift mine and colliers catch a lift to the surface on a coal conveyor.

A South Wales Police spokesman confirmed they were called to the mine at around 9.30am.

The spokesman said: "A man has been taken to the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff by the ambulance service.

"His injuries are not believed to be life-threatening. The Health and Safety Executive has been informed."

The dangers of the mining industry are not putting off plans for new pits.

Western Carbons Ltd is currently applying for permission to open a coal mine which will employ eight people at Penydarren, Gordre'r Graig, just a few miles from Gleision Colliery.

Neath Port Talbot Council which will discuss the proposal next Tuesday but officers have recommended approval of the plan subject to conditions.

Saturday 15 October 2011

## **USA: W. Va. orders emergency mine inspections**

*Extract from CanadianBusiness.com*

CHARLESTON, W. Va. — West Virginia mine safety officials have ordered emergency inspections of up to 500 rescue shelters in the state's underground coal mines.

The Charleston Gazette reported the Office of Miners Health, Safety and Training issued the order Friday.

West Virginia mines are required to contain rescue shelters that could help miners survive the toxic environment inside a mine after an underground explosion.

The agency cited concerns that cracked valves and fittings might make the units inoperable.

The order requires inspections by shelter manufacturers of all inflatable, tent design mine rescue chambers by Oct. 31.

The order also requires mine operators to replace all brass valves and fittings associated with the units' compressed-oxygen cylinders within the next two years.

## **Five die in Dagari coalmine collapse**

*Extract from The Nation, Pakistan*

QUETTA - Five mineworkers died Thursday when a coalmine caved in after a powerful explosion in Dagari area of Mastung district, about 35 kilometres southeast of Quetta Thursday.

According to Balochistan Mines Chief Inspector Iftikhar Ahmed, the incident took place at Sardar Gohar Coal Company in Dagari area.

"The miners were busy extracting coal some 1,200 feet inside the mine when a huge blast occurred after the mine filled with methane gas, leaving five of them dead" he said, adding that two workers, who were away from the site, remained unhurt. Rescuer rushed to the site and retrieved the bodies. The deceased were identified as Abdullah, Zhoor, Sharafat Ali, Gul Wali and Ziaullah. Three of them are residents of Swat and two are locals. The bodies have been sent to their hometowns for burial.

Meanwhile, Balochistan Mines Minister Abdul Rehman Mengal ordered an inquiry into the incident and closure of the mine. In March, more than 40 miners were killed in a coalmine explosion in the Sorange area, some 40 kilometres from Quetta.

Monday 17 October 2011

## **USA: MSHA 'Potential Pattern of Violations Status' Contrary to What Law Intended, Attorney Says**

*Extract from WFPL*

A Kentucky coal mine is now under extra scrutiny after it became the fourth to be recently placed on a 'potential pattern of violations' status by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration. If the mine operator doesn't rectify the problems, the mine can be shut down when serious violations are discovered. But this process is one that mine safety advocates would like to change.

Issuing a 'potential pattern of violations' status is a precursor to the more serious 'pattern of violations' status. But some safety advocates would like to see it eliminated.

Wes Addington is the Deputy Director of the Appalachian Citizens Law Center in Whitesburg. He says under its current regulations, MSHA

has to give companies a warning, but he thinks it goes against what the law originally intended.

Addington supports a rule that MSHA proposed earlier this year that does away with the 'potential' pattern of violations process.

"If that's finalized by MSHA, they no longer would have to issue these, what I call a warning letter," he said. "Basically if a company is one of the worst violators, then they're going to be placed on a pattern without going through this sort of hand holding warning process."

Addington says another area for reform is a practice that requires violations to be finalized before they can count against a mine operator. Because mines often appeal violations, it can sometimes take years for the violations to appear on their record.

"Speeding tickets when you're driving 100 miles an hour over the speed limit or you're racking up DUIs, a judge doesn't have to wait until all of those charges are through the system before he acts proactively and stops you from driving," he said.

Addington estimates there are 17,000 cases backlogged because of the appeals process.

MSHA's finalized rule is expected in the next few months.

Tuesday 18 October 2011

## **UK: Mining disaster survivor arrested**

*Extract from Belfast Telegraph, Northern Ireland*

A pit manager who survived a flooding incident in which four miners died has been arrested on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter.

Malcolm Fyfield, 55, was held by officers from South Wales Police investigating the accident at the Gleision Colliery near Swansea last month.

David Powell, 50, Philip Hill, 44, Garry Jenkins, 39, and Charles Breslin, 62, died after floodwater engulfed a tunnel where they were working on the morning of September 15.

Fyfield was able to escape from the mine and was taken to hospital. His condition was reported as critical at the time.

South Wales Police did not name the suspect, who was arrested in the Swansea Valley on Tuesday morning and is being held at Port Talbot police station.

The victims' families and community leaders were informed of the arrest.



From top left, Garry Jenkins, Phillip Hill, David Powell and Charles Breslin, were killed at Gleision Colliery

Detective Chief Inspector Dorian Lloyd, the senior investigating officer in the case, said: "The arrest follows consultation between South Wales Police, the Health and Safety Executive and the Crown Prosecution Service to review the evidence gathered to date.

"We continue to work closely with the bereaved families throughout this process and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the communities affected by this incident for their continued support and patience.

"We will do everything possible to fully understand how these four men lost their lives."

## USA: Investigation Begins into Miner's Death at Shoemaker Mine

Extract from *The State Journal, USA*

BENWOOD -- WTRF.com has confirmed that one miner has died after what officials referred to as an "above ground" accident in Marshall County.

According to Consol Officials, 62-year-old Charles "Charlie" McIntire died in what they call a track hauling accident around 8 p.m. Monday at the Shoemaker mine.

Several emergency crews were on scene after the call came in to authorities.

It's still unclear exactly what happened but Consol officials are investigating.

Consol officials released the following statement:

"Last evening, we lost a member of the Consol Energy family at our shoemaker mine in an above ground accident. We are working closely with state and federal mine safety officials to determine the incident's cause, and have idled the facility until additional information is secured. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the family and loved ones of our fallen colleague during these difficult times."

### Shoemaker Mine Machinery Fatality preliminary information:

*The victim attempted to use a jumper cable to move the machine (referred to as a hoe, used for trench digging). The machine failed to coast through a gap in the trolley wire and the victim dismounted to connect the jumper cable to the trolley wire to move the machine through the gap. He placed one end of the nip on the energized trolley wire and one end on the harp of the machine's trolley pole. An eye witness account indicated that when the victim placed the nip on the harp, the machine suddenly moved forward and ran over him.*

## Gas blast kills eight miners in China

Extract from *news.com.au*

**A GAS explosion has ripped through a coal mine in southwest China killing eight people**

**and leaving five missing, in the latest accident to hit the country's mining industry.**

The blast at the Fufa Coal Mine in Chongqing municipality occurred yesterday afternoon when 16 miners were working underground, the local authorities said in a statement quoted by the official Xinhua news agency.

Three miners were rescued, two of whom were injured.

China's mining industry has a notoriously poor safety record.

Eleven people were killed on Sunday in a similar explosion at a mine in northern China.

Last year 2433 people died in coal mine accidents in China, according to official statistics - a rate of more than six workers a day.

Labour rights groups 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.

## **Canada: Manitoba mine worker dies in accident**

*Extract from CBC News, Canada*

A Vale employee has died from a workplace accident at the company's nickel mining operation in northern Manitoba.

Greg Leason, 51, succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday, nearly two weeks after the accident at Vale's T-3 mine in Thompson, Man., the company has confirmed.



Vale operates a nickel mining, milling, smelting and refining operation in Thompson, Man. A 51-year-old worker whose equipment fell into a cavern inside the underground mine on Oct. 7 died on Wednesday, the company has confirmed. (CBC)

In a release, Vale said Leason was operating some heavy equipment inside the mine on the morning of Oct. 7.

"He was undergoing ... an installation of a rock-filled bumper," Cory McPhee, Vale's vice-president of corporate affairs in Toronto, told CBC News.

"As he was setting up this barricade underground, the Scooptram — which is a load-haul dump vehicle that you operate underground — went over the edge and fell into an empty block or empty cavern."

McPhee estimated that the cavern was about 30 to 45 metres deep.

Co-workers and paramedics found Leason in the cavern and rushed him to Thompson General Hospital.

He was later transferred to Winnipeg's Health Sciences Centre, where he died.

"All of us are overcome with sadness. This is a terrible loss," Lovro Paulic, one of Vale's three general managers in Manitoba, said in a statement.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with Greg's family and with the men and women who work in the Manitoba operations. Our focus and support is on Greg's family, friends and co-workers."

Leason had worked with Vale for 23 years, according to the company.

Vale says it is taking part in a joint investigation with Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health.

## **Albanian miner dies in chrome mine blast**

*Extract from Reuters Africa*

TIRANA - An Albanian miner died and two out of seven wounded are fighting for their lives on Tuesday after the explosion of a pocket of hydrogen at the Bulqiza chrome mine managed by Austria's DCM DECOMetal .

The Albanian Chrome Company (ACR), wholly owned by DCM DECOMetal, said a group of

airing experts had gone down the mine to measure the amount of gas and prepare the ventilation pipes when they encountered the hydrogen pocket.

"After some time, when these experts were at a distance of 40 to 50 metres from the site of works, there was an explosion," ACR said.

"As a consequence, ventilation expert Naim Shyti lost his life and seven other miners were wounded," it added.

Shyti and another miner were trapped in the rubble. The other man was taken out alive by rescue teams.

The explosion comes after DCM DECOMetal and its 700 miners at Bulqiza agreed to end a strike of almost three months after DCM DECOMetal raised their wages by 20 percent.

DCM DECOMetal said the blast occurred when it started opening a new well to comply with the requirements of its concession agreement with Albania's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy.

The company said the specific reason for the explosion was not yet known, and ACR was awaiting the conclusions of a team of experts and the government agency in charge of mining standards.

Shyti is the first casualty at ACR since it took full control of the concession in 2008.

Fourteen miners have died in the last three years in the area of Bulqiza, one of the richest in chrome in the Balkans. They worked for some of the 60 companies exploiting the mines or the old stocks of chrome or else mined illegally.

## **146 miners trapped underground in Ukraine**

*Extract from Philippine Star*

KIEV (Xinhua) -- A total of 146 miners were blocked in the gateway of the Dzerzhinsky coal mine in the Donetsk region of east Ukraine early Tuesday, the Trade Union of Ukraine's Coal Industry said.

According to the union, the electricity in the gateway was turned off.

Rescuers say lives of miners are out of danger.

"It is impossible to take the miners to the surface now, as the human cage also de-energized. Miners were quickly brought to a safe place - a fresh stream near the trunk. None of the miners suffered," the union said.

The work of the mine would be suspended before full power recovery.

Wednesday 19 October 2011

## **Four more found dead after gas explosion at southwest China coal mine**

*Extract from wireupdate.com*

CHONGQING, CHINA -- Four more bodies were found on Wednesday after a gas explosion ripped through a coal mine in southwestern China earlier this week, the government said, raising the death toll to 13.

The explosion happened at around 1:10 p.m. local time on Monday in Dashu Township of Fengjie County, which is located in China's Chongqing Municipality. A total of sixteen miners were working underground at the Fufa Coal Mine.

Three of the miners were rescued soon after the accident while nine bodies were pulled out, one which was found on Tuesday. But it took a group of 46 rescue workers more than two days to find the four other miners, all whom were apparently killed in the initial explosion.

The cause of the accident remains unknown, but Chinese police have detained six people who were responsible for operations at the mine. Other details about their arrests have not been released.

Safety conditions at mines in China have significantly improved in recent years but they remain among the world's most dangerous with 1,083 fatalities in the first seven months of 2011

alone. There were 2,433 fatalities in 2010 and 2,631 in 2009.

China in recent years shut down scores of small mines to improve safety and efficiency in the mining industry. The country has also ordered all mines to build emergency shelter systems by June 2013 which are to be equipped with machines to produce oxygen and air conditioning, protective walls and airtight doors to protect workers against toxic gases and other hazardous factors.

The first manned test of such a permanent underground chamber was carried out in August when around 100 people - including managers, engineers, miners, medical staff, and the chamber's developers - took part in a 48-hour test at a mine owned by the China National Coal Group in the city of Shuozhou in northern China's Shanxi Province.

One of the worst mining accidents in China in recent years happened in November 2009 when 104 workers were killed after several explosions at a coal mine in Heilongjiang province.

Thursday 20 October 2011

## **USA: Shutting Off Dangerous Mining Equipment**

*Extract from West Virginia Metro News*

The federal Mine Safety and Health Administration asked for some advice and they got an earful during a public hearing in Charleston on Thursday.

MSHA is holding a series of meetings on the proposed Proximity Rule, now out for comment. It requires new equipment on continuous miners, detectors that would shut off the machine if anyone got within three feet of the continuous miner while it was in operation.

Chris Hamilton, the vice president of the West Virginia Coal Association, testified the proximity detection systems have been on their radar for more than three years.

"Our association has been part of a pilot project since 2008 in an effort to evaluate and advance this technology forward," Hamilton said.

In fact, a few mines in West Virginia already have the systems on their continuous miners. They're being tested to see if they really work and can save lives.

One problem Hamilton sees with West Virginia's pilot project and MSHA's attempt to implement the proposed proximity rule is a lack of teamwork.

"We encourage MSHA to coordinate its work and rule development with the state of West Virginia to avoid the issues that we experienced with underground safety shelters where the state had different criteria and safety standards," Hamilton told MSHA.

After the Sago disaster in 2006, West Virginia led the way in mine safety legislation which called for stiffer standards in some cases than the federal mandates. Hamilton says that shouldn't happen again.

Another potential problem with the proposed rule is the timeline MSHA has set. They'd like to see the proximity detection systems in place in all mines within 18 months after the rule is approved.

Brian Thompson with Joy Global, a mining equipment company out of Pennsylvania, says they're ready to start manufacturing the detection systems starting the first of next month.

The problem, MSHA wants every mine to be in compliance, if the rules passes within 18 months. Thompson says considering the number of continuous miners in operation it's not possible at this point.

"We usually average 11 or 12 machines in a given month," Thompson said. "You take that in comparison with the 64 machines [MSHA needs to be retrofitted every month] and you see that's quite a daunting task that's being asked of the industry."

Thompson estimates it would take about 50 months to get the detector systems in place in all mines across the U.S.

The MSHA panel will take the recommendations from Thursday's public hearing back to the federal office. The public comment period runs through November 14.

## **USA: State, feds delayed action on mine shelters**

*Extract from Charleston Gazette, USA*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Concerns about potentially faulty underground mine refuge shelters are much broader than previously reported, but federal and state regulators delayed action on the matter for months, interviews and a review of public records showed this week.

Corroded and improperly sized fittings could be a problem for more than 1,500 shelters in use in coal mines across the country -- including both inflatable, "tent-design" units and other, hardened steel structures, officials acknowledged and records indicated.

Federal and state mine safety officials have understood the problem for months, but only began taking enforcement action in September. Even then, firm steps were delayed at the behest of Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, after coal industry lobbyists complained about the state Office of Miners Health, Safety and Training's plans.

"There was concern about how it was being handled and who was handling it," said Chris Hamilton, a vice president for the West Virginia Coal Association.

The controversy creates a cloud around one of the major reforms put in place by then-Gov. Joe Manchin and by Congress following the Sago Mine Disaster and the Aracoma Mine fire in 2006. Twelve miners died at Sago and two at Aracoma before rescuers could reach them deep underground.

At Manchin's urging, lawmakers mandated that all West Virginia coal miners have access to an emergency shelter that could provide them fresh air, food and water in the event of a fire or explosion. Congress followed up with similar federal requirements for mines nationwide. The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration had the authority to require rescue chambers since 1969, but did so only after a more specific congressional mandate following the 2006 disasters.

The latest controversy began in January, when state inspectors were alerted to an incident involving an inflatable shelter made by the A.L. Lee Corp. in use at an unidentified mine in West Virginia. Company officials had found the door of the unit open and several five-gallon drinking water containers tossed outside of the unit. State officials were told the company believed it was an act of vandalism.

State investigators, though, quickly determined that it was a mechanical failure on compressed oxygen tanks used to inflate the shelter.

"It was determined that a brass fitting attaching one of the oxygen cylinders had failed, allowing for a rapid release of the oxygen into the interior of the shelter," said a Jan. 13 state report. "The additional volume released exerted sufficient pressure to force the access door open and expel some of the contents stored near the door."

At the time, state officials said that "no immediate danger is posed by the identified issue" and that no actions by mine operators were necessary. State officials did ask shelter manufacturers to provide them with "an evaluation of the attributes of their equipment that would prevent such an occurrence" or action plans for inspections and potential corrective actions.

A week later, on Jan. 20, the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration issued an alert to the mining community, warning of what it called a

"catastrophic failure" of a brass fitting on the shelter's oxygen cylinders.

MSHA officials warned that the brass fittings did not meet industry guidelines. They measured 40 percent thinner and 8 percent shorter than recommended by the Compressed Gas Association, according to the MSHA alert. The alert also suggested that leak-detection fluids containing ammonia could have damaged the fittings during routine checks of the units.

Federal regulators recommended -- but did not order -- examinations of all underground mine rescue shelters to ensure that fittings met industry guidelines and were not damaged.

A week after the MSHA alert, a lab contracted by A.L. Lee Corp concluded the fittings on the shelter in question were corroded, probably because of "sulfur dioxide gas in a moist coal-mine environment."

Leonard Urtso, president of A.L. Lee, said his company worked quickly to examine all 133 of its company's inflatable units in use in coal mines in West Virginia. The company found only one other unit on which fittings had "developed some corrosion." In an interview, Urtso downplayed any potential for the fittings to cause a problem for miners.

"Just because there is a crack doesn't mean there's going to be a catastrophic event," Urtso said. "It just means there's going to be a leak."

Urtso said the units are routinely checked by mine operators and examined every six months by his company, reducing the chances of a problem. "Your chances of hitting the lottery are a lot better than that happening," he said.

Still, in February, A.L. Lee reported finding cracked fittings on a third unit at another mine, and MSHA again recommended -- but did not order -- that mine operators have shelter manufacturers examine their units and fix any problems.

From May through July, additional reports from a contractor for A.L. Lee and by a Department of

Labor lab both confirmed potential problems with fitting corrosion.

By September, state mine safety Director C.A. Phillips was preparing to issue an order to for the first time require mine operators and shelter manufacturers to inspect units for potential fitting corrosion. Phillips and other state officials were becoming especially concerned because similar brass fittings were used on all types of underground shelters, not just the A.L. Lee inflatable models.

At some point, though, coal industry officials raised concerns about the state's plans with both the governor's office and the Department of Commerce, which oversees the state mine safety agency.

Hamilton said the coal association had thought all along the January incident was an isolated one, and that state officials were giving the industry deadlines that were too tight to conduct inspections of all of their shelters.

"They sprang an awful lot of information on the industry in a relatively short period of time," Hamilton said. "Those concerns were expressed across the board."

But in a separate interview, coal association President Bill Raney said operators and shelter manufacturers had taken the situation very seriously from the start.

"Everybody has been checking these -- all of the manufacturers and all of the operators," Raney said. "We're well along the way."

Still, the governor's office told mine safety agency officials to put together a briefing to explain its findings and its planned actions to the industry.

Jacqueline A. Proctor, a spokeswoman for Tomblin, said the governor's office "did not intervene at the request of any organization" and has "full confidence" in Phillips.

Proctor said the governor's office routinely monitors enforcement actions by state agencies, and did so in this instance to ensure the order

was clear and contained deadlines that industry would be able to meet.

But the additional meeting added to delays in action, and had the effect of putting off any formal action by the state until after the Oct. 4 general election, in which Tomblin faced Republican Bill Maloney, a Morgantown drilling company executive whose campaign promoted his involvement in a major mine rescue in Chile.

State officials had drafted one order dated Sept. 29 and shared it with mining industry lobbyists during a meeting last Friday. But at the industry's request, the order was rewritten to ensure previous inspections by manufacturers could count toward one mandated by the order and to allow waivers of inspection and repair deadlines.

Phil Smith, a spokesman for the United Mine Workers, said union officials only learned about the shelter problems in the last few weeks and were "troubled" by a lack of transparency on the issue.

Smith noted a similar lack of transparency or discussion with miners' advocates in the ongoing investigation of major problems with the CSE Corp.'s SR-100, the most widely used emergency breathing device in the coal industry.

"This is not the first time this has happened," Smith said. "We were again the last people to know."

Listed below are a number of the presentations given at the Proximity Detection workshop held in Sydney in February 2011. Not all presentations have been provided to NSW Trade & Investment for publication.

If you would like a particular presentation that does not appear on the list, please contact Julie Downie on 02 4931 6624 or email

[julie.downie@industry.nsw.gov.au](mailto:julie.downie@industry.nsw.gov.au) for details.



2011 Proximity Detection  
Workshop

WatervieW Convention Centre, Sydney  
Olympic Park - 8-9 February 2011

Title
Prevention of Vehicle Interaction Collisions - Tilman Rasche
Proximity Detection Workshop - opening address - Rob Regan
Proximity Detection & Anti Collision Workshop - Steve Bath
Investigation Case Studies - Investigation unit report - Tony Smith
Functional Safety of Proximity Detection and Collision Avoidance Systems in Mines - Marcus Punch
The importance of considering human factors - Julie Pengelly
Implementing Proximity Detection – How Good do our people have to be? - Peter Standish
Preview Radar Systems - David Howell
Manufacturer Presentation - Advanced Mining Technologies - Craig Hoffman
Collision Avoidance System - Tony Napier
Proximity Systems - Eric De Zoeten
Intelligent industrial wireless technology - Cliff Rogers
Mine Site Technologies - Denis Kent
SAFEmine – Traffic Awareness System - Martin Smith
Integrated Approach to Proximity Detection - Lucas van Latum
Caterpillar Mining Technology - Chris Hood
Collision Awareness Systems Another Defence - Ben Willey
Proximity Detection. A mine sites viewpoint - Jon Chapman
RTCA Proximity Detection - Gavin White
Proximity Detection Workshop - Butcher Paper Notes

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety>

## Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

### B

#### BACK TO BACK

A double plug receptacle for joining two miner cables together.



-Ed