



Mining Accident News No.1131

21 to 31 October 2011

In this issue:

Canada: Mining company fined \$100k for safety violations	1
Two US coal miners killed.....	1
Quote of the week	3
China: Bodies of 13 trapped miners recovered. 3	
Prosecutors: Massey security director lied to federal agents.....	4
USA: MSHA Releases Report on Guyan Mine Fatality	5
USA: Bad Brakes Contributed to Mining Death 6	
USA: 17-year-old rescued from mine shaft near Golden	6
This week in mining accident history	7
USA: Union Says Massey's Actions Amounted to Homicide	8
Six Gold Miners Killed as Walls Collapse.....	10
USA: Security Chief Guilty in Mine-Blast Case 11	
China: Coal mine blast leaves 7 dead, 11 missing	12
Guyana government to probe fatal mining accident	12
Mining dictionary	12

Friday 21 October 2011

Canada: Mining company fined \$100k for safety violations

Extract from CBCnews, Canada

Charges stem from apprentice mechanic's death in 2009

A mining company in Yukon has been fined more than \$100,000 for workplace safety violations.

Procon Mining and Tunnelling pled guilty to two Occupational Safety charges in relation to the 2009 death of 20-year-old Paul Wentzell.



Procon Mining and Tunnelling, which operates the Wolverine mine in Yukon, has been fined more than \$100,000 for workplace safety violations. The charges stem from when an apprentice mechanic, 20-year-old Paul Wentzell, died there in 2009.

Wentzell, who was from Newfoundland and Labrador, was working for Procon as an apprentice mechanic.

He was killed by an un-occupied vehicle at the underground Wolverine mine.

Investigators found that the Toyota Land Cruiser he was operating had been parked on an incline, but its emergency brakes failed and the vehicle rolled back and struck him.

Judge John Faulkner said the company failed to make sure its equipment was in safe operating condition.

Faulkner added that Wentzell was not adequately trained to operate the vehicle.

But the judge said Procon had an excellent safety record prior to the accident, and has implemented safety measures since then.

Saturday 22 October 2011

Two US coal miners killed

Extract from wsws.org

A West Virginia miner was killed at a Consol Energy mine in Marshall County Monday night. Charles McIntire, a 62-year-old coal miner at the Shoemaker Mine on the Ohio River near Moundsville, West Virginia died after being struck by a piece of equipment he was operating.

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 31 of 2011

McIntire dismounted a loading machine he was driving after it failed to coast across a “jump,” the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration stated in its initial report. A jump is an area where a 50-foot break in the trolley wire is left in order for vehicles to cross. When McIntire attempted to use a jumper cable to re-energize the loader, it suddenly moved forward, cutting off his leg.

According to Marshall County Emergency Management Agency Director Tom Hart, the first calls reporting a leg injury were not placed to the Marshall County 911 center. Instead, mine officials made calls directly to STAT Medevac and Tri-State EMS. When the medical helicopter and ambulance arrived, however, they found that additional help was needed, such as local firefighters to set up the landing zone.

It is unclear whether or not a direct call to the 911 center would have provided emergency crews with enough time to save McIntire’s life, but Hart suggested it would have been a more appropriate response. “A direct call to 911 simplifies everything,” he said, “By dialing 911, all those resources are managed from a single point of contact.”

Hart said officials from the EMA will be meeting with Consol to determine if all emergency procedures were followed properly.

McIntire had 30 years experience at the mine. His is the second death at a Consol mine in Marshall County this year. In early February, a bulldozer operator was killed after being pinned between his machine and a water truck at Consol’s McElroy Mine. MSHA later ruled that this death was outside its jurisdiction and not chargeable to the mining industry.

While the Shoemaker Mine is an underground mine, McIntire was killed above-ground at the mine’s Ohio River portal. The operation is large, employing more than 700 miners who extract millions of tons of coal every year. In 2010, the mine produced more 3.85 million tons; so far this

year, production has been significantly higher, with 4.1 million as of the third quarter.

Federal data records at least 15 injuries at the Shoemaker Mine since the beginning of the year, and nearly 500 citations for safety violations, many of them significant and substantial (S&S). This designation is reserved for violations serious enough to warrant the halting of operations because they present the risk of imminent death or injury.

McIntire is the seventh coal miner to be killed in West Virginia this year and the seventeenth nationwide. MSHA has since ruled that two of these deaths are “not chargeable” to the mining industry.

On October 7, a 23-year-old Kentucky mine electrician was killed when a mobile bridge fell and pinned him underneath. Richard D. Coots Jr., employed by Owlco Energy LLC, left behind a wife and two young girls, ages four years and two months.

According to the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing, Coots crawled under a mobile bridge to repair a conveyor chain when the bridge collapsed on him.

The young Evarts resident is the fourth coal mining fatality in that state this year. Family members described him as a “good father, good husband, [and] hard worker” who was “tickled that he was going to be a father again.”

The tragedy of Coots’ death highlights the conditions of life facing many families throughout Appalachia where the hazards of the mining industry are among the few places to make decent pay.

Coots had five years’ experience, having entered the mines at 18 years of age. He was working beside his younger brother, who carried his body out of the mine after the accident. The accident came only one year after another Coots brother, Justin, was killed in a car accident on his way home from working at a coal mine. Justin was only 20 years old at the time.

According to the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, the Letcher County mine near Partridge, Kentucky, has been operated by Owlco Energy since September 2008. With an average crew of 19 miners, it is typical of the multitude of small and treacherous underground mining operations throughout the region.

Last week West Virginia Office of Miners Health, Safety, and Training (MHS&T) cited Rhino Eastern and Arch Coal for the deaths of two miners early this year based on findings from a state investigation.

Miner Joseph M. Cassell, 33, was killed at Rhino's Eagle No. 1 Mine in Raleigh County after part of an underground mine roof and wall collapsed on him. State inspectors have issued Rhino 16 citations related to improper roof and wall stabilization, as well as inadequate ventilation. Officials also found that Rhino was in violation for not having an emergency medical technician on staff at the time of the accident.

State inspectors also issued citations in the August 15 death of 46-year-old Charles M. Hall. Hall was also killed in a roof fall as he helped move the longwall machine at the Mountaineer II Mine in Logan County, West Virginia. The mine's operator, Mingo Logan Coal Co. is a subsidiary of energy giant Arch Coal.

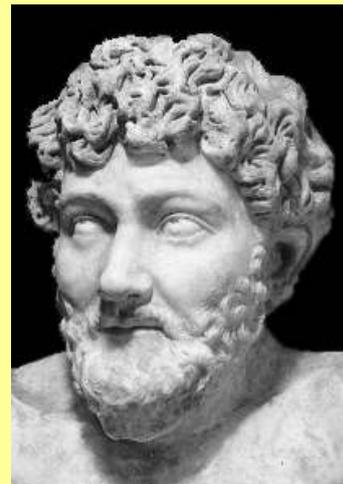
State inspectors found Mingo Logan in violation for not properly supporting the roof while the longwall shields were removed. Two personal citations were issued to foremen Kenny Evans and Jeff Golden for not following the roof support plan.

In briefing the mine safety board on the results of their investigation, the state's supervising inspector John Kinder admitted there were some "flaws" in the current emergency response procedures. Mingo Logan called the county's emergency services within 15 minutes of the accident as required by law; however, state mine safety officials weren't notified until more than 40 minutes later.

Kinder explained that since a mine operator is not required to report an accident directly to mine safety officials, news of it often has to first travel through local emergency officials and then to the state Homeland Security Office before it is relayed to them. According to Kinder, the procedure is clearly "not working."

Kinder noted that some coal operators call him directly to report accidents while others call 911 and often don't provide enough information for emergency responders to even know what has occurred. "There are times that we don't get all the information that we need," Kinder said. In accidents that are not instantly fatal, like Charles McIntire's, such a policy of tight-lipped reporting of accidents can be the difference between life and death.

Quote of the week



"Every truth has two sides; it is as well to look at both, before we commit ourselves to either."

Aesop
Greek author (620-560 BC)

Monday 24 October 2011

China: Bodies of 13 trapped miners recovered

Extract from UPI

The bodies of all 13 workers trapped nearly two weeks ago when a coal mine in northeastern China flooded were recovered, authorities said Monday.

Rescue efforts failed to save any of the 13 who were trapped when their Jindi coal mine in Heilongjiang province flooded Oct. 11, the news agency Xinhua reported, quoting the director of the local municipal safety supervision bureau in the city of Jixi.

Twenty-four miners were working underground when the flooding occurred but 11 of them escaped.

The state-run news agency said the owner of the privately owned mine tried to cover up the accident and has since been detained. Three municipal officials have been dismissed over the alleged coverup, the report said.

There have been a number of mine disasters in the country in recent years despite massive efforts to improve safety and crack down on illegal mines.

An official report last year said about half of China's 5.5 million coal miners are migrant workers, many of whom are not adequately trained in basic safety rules.

Seventeen miners died earlier this month after a massive buildup of gas in a coal mine in southwestern China's Guizhou province. The provincial governor was quoted by official media as blaming those types of accidents on the failure to close unsafe mines.

Prosecutors: Massey security director lied to federal agents

Extract from Charleston Gazette

BECKLEY, W.Va. -- A Massey Energy security director lied to federal agents and tried to destroy potential evidence in the investigation of the Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster, prosecutors told a federal jury Monday morning.

"In fact, Mr. Stover's security guards did announce the arrival of inspectors. They did that because he trained them to do so," said Phil Wright, assistant U.S. Attorney.

Trial began this morning with opening statements in the trial of Hughie Elbert Stover,

security director at Massey subsidiary Performance Coal, which operated the Upper Big Branch Mine.

Originally, Stover was charged in March in a two-count indictment alleging that he lied to FBI agents and U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration officials and then tried to destroy thousands of pages of security documents that investigators believed could shed light on how Massey handles inspection warnings.

In May, Stover was charged with a third count, this one alleging that he also lied to MSHA investigators conducting the civil investigation of the disaster. The original indictment was based on testimony of FBI and MSHA agents, while the additional charge drew on a formal interview taken down word-for-word by a court reporter.

Late last week, prosecutors dropped one of the original two counts, involving allegations that Stover lied to the FBI and MSHA during an unrecorded interview in January.

Defense attorney Bill Wilmoth told jurors that Massey lawyers had signed off on the general policy of announcing all non-company visitors to the mine site.

Wilmoth also accused prosecutors of a "rush to judgment" in Stover's case, while not bringing charges against anyone actually responsible for the April 2010 explosion that killed 29 miners.

"We all want to see some justice for that, but after 568 days, countless man hours of agents scouring southern West Virginia and millions of dollars, the government brings its first case against a security guard," Wilmoth said.

U.S. District Judge Irene Berger said the trial is expected to last three to four days.

The government alleges that Stover initially lied about inspection warnings during a transcribed interview in November 2010 with a civil investigation team composed of MSHA officials, state inspectors and special investigator Davitt McAteer.

If convicted of the two remaining charges, Stover would still face up to 25 years in prison.

Federal law generally prohibits advance notification of any MSHA inspection, and since the Upper Big Branch explosion agency officials have been cracking down on what many say is a widespread industry practice that was raised by families of the Upper Big Branch miners during a congressional field hearing held in Beckley just weeks after the disaster.

Court records say that FBI agents and MSHA special investigators have been looking into allegations that advance notice of inspections "had been given on a regular and continuing basis" at the Upper Big Branch Mine.

Providing advance notice of inspections is a misdemeanor, carrying a penalty of up to six months in jail. Legislation to make it felony with stiffer penalties is stalled in Congress.

Stover is one of two people charged criminally so far in a sprawling federal criminal probe of Upper Big Branch. The April 5, 2010, explosion was the worst U.S. coal-mining disaster in nearly 40 years.

Last month, Berger sentenced former Upper Big Branch miner Thomas Harrah to 10 months in jail. Harrah pleaded guilty to faking a foreman's license when he performed key mine safety examinations at the mine between January 2008 and August 2009 and to then lying to investigators about his actions.

A report by special investigator Davitt McAteer and preliminary findings from MSHA agreed that the explosion involved an ignition of a small amount of methane gas that turned into a massive coal-dust blast because of Massey's poor safety practices.

Investigators believe the ignition likely was sparked by worn-out longwall cutting teeth hitting sandstone on the longwall machine's shearer. They also believe that a coal-dust buildup underground sent what could have been a minor ignition into an explosion that rocketed

in all directions, greatly increasing the damage and deaths.

The McAteer team concluded the disaster was caused by Massey's failure to follow basic safety standards, and by a corporate culture that put coal production ahead of worker safety. McAteer and his team cited poor ventilation practices, illegal accumulations of highly explosive coal dust, and a failure to maintain water sprays and cutting bits on the longwall shearer.

The McAteer report also criticized the West Virginia Office of Miners Health, Safety and Training and said the fact that 29 miners died in a mine explosion was proof positive that MSHA "failed its duty as a watchdog for coal miners."

Alpha Natural Resources, which bought Massey in June, has said it is still reviewing the disaster.

USA: MSHA Releases Report on Guyan Mine Fatality

Extract from www.cbs59.com

The Mine Safety and Health Administration released a report on the May 14 accident at Guyan Mine that killed Richard Young.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration issued a report Monday on the May 14 fatality at Guyan Mine in Logan County that killed 37-year-old Richard Young.

MSHA's report states the accident that killed the mechanic with 14 years of mining experience happened because "proper work procedures were not being followed."

Young was removing the fuel tank and counter weight from an end loader when the accident occurred. The report said the bolts were removed without installing proper blocking to be sure the counter weight was secure.

Two mechanics were preparing the machine to remove the fuel tank, which they suspected had contaminants in it. One mechanic was working in the engine radiator compartment area. Young was underneath the machine removing the bolts, and when he began removing the 15th bolt, the

11,685 lb. counter weight fell, according to MSHA, crushing the victim.

The report from MSHA said that task is not a routine repair and is not performed on a regular basis.

The mine was given a noncontributory violation for not maintaining a copy of Young's task training records.

Mine management implemented a written procedure that requires verification that adequate securing material is in place before anyone works under machinery or removes big components. Mechanics who perform tasks that are not done on a regular basis are now required to refer to service manuals or service guides for safe repair procedures before beginning the task.

Guyan Mine's parent company is Patriot Coal Company. Guyan Mine employs 214 people and operates both two active loader pits and two active excavator pits.

USA: Bad Brakes Contributed to Mining Death

Extract from MetroNews, W.Va, USA

A fatal accident on a Fayette County mine site from last December is blamed on faulty equipment and poor maintenance of a coal truck according to a report released by MSHA Tuesday.

Truck driver Keith Qualls was killed when he lost his brakes on a steep haul road leaving Republic Energy's Elk Run Coal Company operation near Mahan on December 4, 2010. Qualls, who was driving for Medford Trucking, was loaded and following other trucks out of the mine site when he noticed his trailer brakes were not functioning properly.

Investigators say he passed the truck ahead of him on the narrow haul road and attempted to run his truck into an axle berm, which is designed to stop runaway trucks. According to the MSHA investigation, the truck failed to

center on the berm and flipped over on its side, pinning Qualls under the cab. Fellow drivers and EMS worked to free Qualls, but he was dead before they could get the truck off him.

MSHA finds in its final investigation of the incident there were mismatched brake chambers on the drive axle of the truck. MSHA investigators add the brakes on the truck were not properly maintained, unsafe conditions were overlooked in a pre-shift inspection, and the victim was not wearing a seat belt.

Read full MSHA report at

<http://www.msha.gov/FATALS/2010/FTL10c48.asp>

USA: 17-year-old rescued from mine shaft near Golden

Extract from 9News.com

JEFFERSON COUNTY - Authorities have rescued a 17-year-old boy from a mine shaft near Golden. He was able to walk down from the mine shaft on his own.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office says the teen was stuck on a ledge and could not get out on his own.

The sheriff's department says the call came in around 6 p.m. The teen was rescued around 8:30 p.m.

He is a student at Golden High School.

Authorities say the teen and his friend were hiking when they entered the mine shaft. The mine shaft is only about eight minutes from their home.

The boys were about 100 feet into the mine and were leaving when the ground gave way and some rocks fell out of place. One of the teens was able to get out, but the other became trapped on the ledge.

The boy was able to talk with authorities before the rescue.

The Colorado School of Mines rescue team responded to the scene to help rescue the teen.

Jefferson County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Jacki Kelley said emergency responders' first priority was the teenager's safety.

Deputies will determine who owns the mine and decide whether any trespassing charges will be filed.

They also plan to investigate ways to prevent others from accessing the mine shaft in the future.

"We would discourage people from going into any of these mine shafts, any of these caves at all. It can be extremely dangerous, not only to the person, but to the rescuers who have to work in those conditions," Kelley said.

This week in mining accident history

22 October 1913

Stag Canyon Mine No.2

Dawson, New Mexico, USA

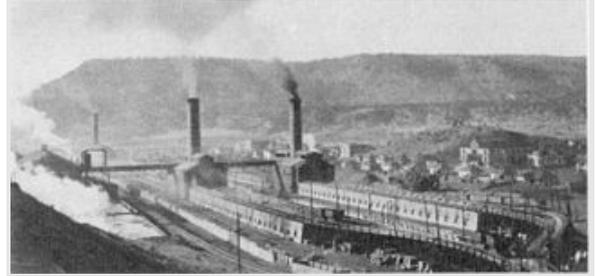
Underground coal mine

263 killed, coal dust explosion

Source: www.wikipedia.org
www.usmra.com

On October 22, 1913, Dawson suffered its first major disaster. Stag Canyon Mine No. 2, owned by Phelps, Dodge and Company, was shaken by an explosion that was felt two miles away in the town proper. Relief teams rushed in from surrounding communities, but of the 286 men who arrived to work in the Stag Canyon mine that morning, only 23 survived. Two rescuers died during the rescue effort. It was later determined that the explosion was caused by a dynamite charge set off while the mine was in general operation, igniting coal dust in the mine. This was in violation of mining safety laws.

The other mines remained productive after the disaster in Mine No. 2. Then, on February 8, 1923, Stag Canyon Mine No. 1 suffered an explosion. A mine car derailed, igniting coal dust in the mine. 123 men were killed in this explosion, many of them children of the men who died in 1913.



[The Coke Ovens in Dawson, 1920](#)

From the U. S. Bureau of Mines Report by G. S. Rice

The mine, opened by drifts, employed about 300 men. Coal was undercut, mostly by machine but some by hand-pick mining. Permissible explosives were used, fired electronically from outside. The mine was dry, and sprays were placed at intervals to wet the dust; they were not effective beyond 6 feet. The mine was usually free from firedamp except for occasional pockets, coming from the roof. Open lights were used.

At about 3 p.m. blasts carrying smoke and dust burst out of the main openings. The explosion doors and one side of the fan house were blown out but were repaired in less than 2 hours.

Of the 284 men in the mine, 14 from an unaffected section came out safely, and nine others, unconscious near the bottom of the airshaft, were rescued by an apparatus crew about 8 p.m. They were revived by the use of pulmotors.

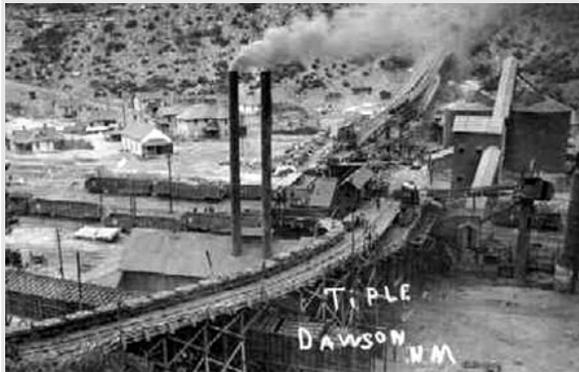
Two helmet men were lost that night when they overtaxed the oxygen supply by overexertion and going in farther than instructed. The oxygen was supplied at a fixed rate and when they tried to remove the oxygen bottles to breathe from them, they were overcome by afterdamp.

The explosion originated in a dusty pillar section where an overcharged shot had been fired. The explosion was propagated by coal dust along the haulage roads and into most of the workings, except where water and inert dust in the roads caused it to die away.



Hand mining - Dawson Coal Mine, circa 1900s

The violence was not great, but cars were wrecked in some places and most of the stoppings blown out. Dynamite was used in blasting rock and may have been used in the pillar shot. The use of permissible explosives for all blasting, blasting only after the shift, and use of rock dust with the watering system were recommended.



Tipple No.1&2 – Dawson, NM, circa 1900s



The Stag Canyon dead were buried in a special section of the Dawson cemetery, each with a small iron cross.

Wednesday 26 October 2011

USA: Union Says Massey's Actions Amounted to Homicide

Extract from abc news

The nation's largest mine workers union accused Massey Energy Co. and its managers on Tuesday of "industrial homicide" for creating the conditions behind the April 2010 explosion that killed 29 men at a southern West Virginia coal mine.

In a scathing 90-page report on its own investigation into the Upper Big Branch disaster, the United Mine Workers of America called the company "a rogue corporation" that put profits first and safety last, and labeled the Montcoal mine "a bomb waiting to go off." Massey is now owned by Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources.

The union demanded criminal prosecution of at least 18 Massey managers, including former Chief Executive Don Blankenship, who retired last December and has since vanished from public view.

It also recommends more than a dozen changes in state and federal laws and regulations to crack down on bad operators, from tougher penalties for illegal ventilation plan changes to stronger protections for whistleblowers reporting safety problems.

The UMW also rebuked federal regulators with the Mine Safety and Health Administration — and, to a lesser extent, their state counterparts — for what it called an "unconscionable" failure to use all the tools they had to shut down the long-troubled mine and prevent the nation's deadliest coal mine explosion in four decades.

Rather, the union charges, MSHA District 4 managers discouraged field inspectors who tried to strenuously enforce the law — one reason it also recommends Congress mandate independent investigations when mining accidents cause multiple deaths.

MSHA, which has yet to publish its final report, said it's reviewing the union report and will consider its recommendations. Director Joe Main said MSHA agrees that Massey maintained a culture that valued profits over lives.

"These findings underline the fact that MSHA can't be in every mine every shift, and that some mine operators take advantage of that," he said, adding that he has asked Congress for more tools to protect miners.

"MSHA has already begun to make a number of administrative, regulatory, and policy changes as a result of the lessons learned from UBB," he said, "and we are aggressively moving forward with those changes to improve the safety and health of our nation's miners."

Alpha said it has yet to reach its own conclusions about what happened at Upper Big Branch but noted that since it took over Massey operations in June, it has launched a "Running Right" safety program and trained more than 7,500 people.

"I think the goal everyone shares is to ensure that an accident like this never occurs again," said spokesman Ted Pile.

Miner Stanley Stewart, who worked at Upper Big Branch the day of the blast, and Patty Quarles, whose son Gary died there, agree with the UMW that Massey managers must be prosecuted.

"Somebody called the shots, and I don't think these sections bosses and mine foremen can be held accountable alone," Quarles said. "It goes higher than that. It goes all the way up the ladder to Blankenship. ... He needs to pay for what he's done."

Stewart said even though MSHA inspectors could have done more, he believes they were under a lot of pressure.

"Massey manipulated them and manipulated the system to fool them a lot of times," he said.

The union contends MSHA had plenty of opportunity to intervene: From Jan. 1, 2009, until

the explosion on April 5, 2010, it cited Upper Big Branch for 645 violations and imposed penalties of more than \$1.2 million.

But those citations "were having no tangible impact," it says. Violations that are contested can't be used to increase enforcement efforts, and Massey contested 229 of its citations. At the same time, the union says, MSHA attorneys were routinely settling cases with lower fines.

The UMW suggests operators be required to put proposed fines into escrow while violations are being disputed, and that additional fines be levied if the dispute is eventually deemed frivolous.

MSHA could have conducted inspection blitzes, cited the company for flagrant violations and closed the mine, the union said. "Yet our investigation did not reveal a plan on the part of District 4 to address the problems at UBB."

Massey regularly treated MSHA's rules and inspectors with disdain, the union said, so the agency "should have realized it had to be even more protective of the miners."

Although Upper Big Branch was a nonunion mine, the UMW was designated a legal miners' representative after the blast and participated in much of the investigation.

"The union believes that Massey Energy and its management were on notice of and recklessly tolerated mining conditions that were so egregious that the resulting disaster constituted a massive slaughter in the nature of an industrial homicide," it says.

An industrial homicide charge doesn't exist in either West Virginia, where the mine was located, or Virginia, where its owners are headquartered. Still, the UMW believes the government could prosecute Massey under other laws.

The accident is the target of continuing criminal investigations, but so far, only one Massey official has been indicted. Former security chief Hughie Elbert Stover went on trial in U.S. District

Court in Beckley this week, charged with ordering a subordinate to destroy thousands of documents.

The union's theory of what caused the blast mirrors the conclusions of both an independent panel appointed by former Gov. Joe Manchin and MSHA, which has given several public briefings on its work.

All three investigations concluded that poorly maintained machines cutting into sandstone created a spark that ignited both a small amount of naturally occurring methane gas and a massive accumulation of explosive coal dust. Malfunctioning water sprayers allowed what could have been a small flare-up to become an epic blast that travelled seven miles of underground corridors, doubling back on itself and killing men instantly.

The union also reiterated MSHA's position that the explosion could have been prevented or contained. Had the mine been sufficiently dusted with pulverized limestone to render the coal dust inert, the report says, the spark wouldn't have had the fuel needed to propagate.

In the year before the Upper Big Branch blast, the union noted, 70 ignitions occurred at U.S. coal mines, and none resulted in fatalities.

Like the independent report, the union also faults MSHA for failing to take charge of the search and rescue operations.

Witness interviews revealed that Massey executives Chris Blanchard and Jason Whitehead charged deep into the mine after the blast and stayed inside for hours, despite the concerns of MSHA officials who believed they were ignoring established mine-rescue protocols and leaving footprints that could throw off the searchers.

The union called the level of confusion "unacceptable" and said it's impossible to complete a thorough investigation until Blanchard and Whitehead's actions in those hours are revealed. The two are among 18 Massey officials who have invoked their Fifth

Amendment rights and refused to testify in the investigation.

The UMW also criticizes MSHA for allowing Massey to use 33 sets of airlock doors to control air flow, rather than traditional ventilation systems. It calls for that practice to be banned.

Citing witness interviews, the union said it appears that Upper Big Branch crews deviated from the MSHA-approved ventilation plans illegally, intentionally and almost daily — so frequently that the company could not produce the maps it's required to submit.

MSHA cited the mine for ventilation-related violations more than 100 times in the 18 months before the blast, the union said, yet the agency did not take stronger action. It recommends that illegal changes to ventilation plans be cited as "flagrant" violations, resulting in automatic \$200,000 fines and the immediate evacuation of underground personnel.

Six Gold Miners Killed as Walls Collapse

Extract from allAfrica.com

Six miners were yesterday killed in a disastrous afternoon cave-in at a gold mine in a remote area of Nyabisawa location in Migori district. The disaster occurred near Nyamome trading centre in the mine rich area of Migori county after the walls of the mine caved in on the miners who had been working in the mine for over eight hours in the same area.

Migori deputy police boss James Mwangi said the six men went into the mines early in the morning but were not lucky enough to come out due to the weak soil that yielded to pressure before the walls caved in. "The bodies of six people have already been recovered," said Mwangi Migori who led the operation to retrieve the trapped bodies from the mines.

He said only the deceased were in the mine when the accident occurred and that five died on the spot while another one succumbed to death while undergoing treatment after he had been

rescued from the rabbles. Locals however gave a different account of the disaster, saying over 10 miners were in the mine before its walls caved in at 2pm yesterday.

The incident comes amid a spate of other mine-related accidents in the region and its environs with the latest being the killing of three people including a foreigner at the nearby Rachuonyo Gold Mines. So far this year, more than 30 people have been killed in mining accidents in Migori, most of them as a result of cave-ins in tunnels. He said, one of the victims was rescued with serious injuries but later died while undergoing treatment.

The OCPD, said as a result of many deaths in the mines, authorities have closed all the mining activities and are filling up the mines until when the mining community embrace modern technology. "We have closed all the mines and we are filling them up with the help of the community, so far all mining activities have been suspended until a later date when they will start using modern technology.

Thursday 27 October 2011

USA: Security Chief Guilty in Mine-Blast Case

Extract from The Wall Street Journal, USA

A Massey Energy Co. security chief was convicted Wednesday on both charges he was facing related to the investigation of the 2010 explosion in West Virginia that killed 29 miners, in the first criminal case to come from the disaster.

Hughie Elbert Stover was found guilty by a jury in U.S. District Court in Beckley, W.Va., of obstructing a federal criminal investigation, and lying to federal investigators. Mr. Stover, who had been security chief of the Upper Big Branch mine since 1999, faces a maximum penalty of 25 years in prison but remains free pending a Feb. 29 sentencing.

The case marks a victory for the government which has undertaken a broad criminal probe into the blast, the worst U.S. mining accident in four decades. No other mine personnel or Massey officials have been charged but the criminal investigation is continuing.

"Today's verdict sends a clear message that when a person obstructs an investigation—especially an investigation as important as this one—there will be consequences," said U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin.

The obstruction charge was for ordering a security guard to dispose of thousands of security-related documents earlier this year, several months after Mr. Stover was interviewed by investigators about the accident.

Mr. Stover testified Tuesday in his own defense that the records disposal was an innocent oversight, the "stupidest mistake" he had made in his life.

He was charged with lying to federal investigators about notifying mine personnel when government inspectors arrived on the property, which is itself a violation of federal law. He testified that he hadn't lied to investigators about announcing government inspectors because he understood notification to involve using the telephone, a practice he prohibited.

Mr. Stover's attorney, William D. Wilmoth of Steptoe & Johnson, declined to say Wednesday whether he would appeal. "We are all obviously disappointed with the verdict," he said, but noted that "the debate was vigorous" among the jury, which deliberated for about six hours.

Mr. Wilmoth had argued that the government engaged in a "rush to judgment" against his client while the people who were directly responsible for the mine accident have yet to be charged. "Elbert Stover is the head security guard. Now we hope that our government will go after the real villain or villains," he said Wednesday.

In closing arguments, Assistant U.S. Attorney Larry Ellis drew a link between Mr. Stover's trial

and potential future cases, according to the Associated Press. "There's too much at stake here," he said, adding that the jury should "send a message that this investigation ought to be allowed to go forward."

Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources Inc. acquired Massey in June. Alpha officials couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

China: Coal mine blast leaves 7 dead, 11 missing

Extract from Xinhua

Seven people have been confirmed dead and 11 others are missing after a gas outburst occurred early Thursday at a coal mine in central China's Henan Province.

A spokesman with the provincial work safety authorities said the gas rush happened shortly after the midnight, when 18 workers were operating underground at the Jiulishan Coal Mine in Jiaozuo.

The search and rescue is still on, the spokesman said.

Monday 31 October 2011

Guyana government to probe fatal mining accident

Extract from caribbean360.com

GEORGETOWN, Guyana, - Government has announced that a full investigation would be conducted into Sunday's fatal mining accident at Kwakwani, a village in the Upper Demerara-Berbice Region.

Franklyn Reece, 20, was killed, while another man remains hospitalised in critical condition after the wall of the bauxite mine they were sampling collapsed.



Franklyn Reece, 20, was killed, while another man remains hospitalised in critical condition after the wall of the bauxite mine they were sampling collapsed. (File photo)

Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, who is also responsible for mining, has had discussions with the Minister of Labour Manzoor Nadir.

A government statement said a team of officers would be dispatched to determine the facts and to provide an immediate report on the accident.

"Early in this week, a team will be appointed to conduct a full investigation into this fatal accident in an effort to establish where regulations to ensure occupational safety and health might not have been satisfied, and to determine other factors, if any, that might have contributed to this unfortunate incident," the government said.

The prime minister described the incident at the mine owned by Bauxite Company Guyana Inc. as unfortunate and extended condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

The prime minister also wished the injured man an early and full recovery.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BACKWARDATION When a derivative instrument (future or swap) price is below the expected future spot price.

-Ed