



Mining Accident News No.1132

1 to 25 November 2011

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Tuesday 1 November 2011

Philippines: Underground gold miner killed

Extract from Australian Mining

An underground mining has been killed at Medusa Mining's Co-O gold mine in the Philippines.



According to the company, the miner was involved in a fatal accident in a shrinkage stope at the mine.

Broken ore upon which the miner was standing "collapsed due to an undetectable cavity caused by bridging above the full ore chute", Medusa says.

The man was recovered by the site's mine rescue team, but was later declared dead upon arrival at the mine hospital.

Medusa say this accident, the lost time accident in six months, will cause a reduction in the December quarter production, as the stopes have stopped operation while an investigation is carried out.

Apart from the stopes, the rest of the mine is continuing operations.

Mexico: Primero Reports Fatality at Its San Dimas Mine

Extract from MarketWatch.com

TORONTO, ONTARIO, -- Primero Mining Corp. regrets to report a fatal accident involving one of its employees at its San Dimas Mine in Mexico this weekend.

The accident was an isolated incident that occurred during underground mining operations. The Company is working with local authorities which have commenced an investigation into the accident while normal operations at the mine continue.

The Company wishes to extend its sincere condolences to the family and colleagues of the deceased.

Work suspended at Montana mine after fatality

Extract from Canadian Business

BILLINGS, Mont. — Underground work has been suspended at a central Montana precious metals mine as federal safety inspectors investigate a worker fatality 1,200 feet beneath the surface.

Stillwater Mining Co. spokesman John Beaudry on Monday described the death as an isolated accident. He says no one else was injured and there was no collapse inside the mine.

Beaudry says further details, including the identity of the miner, will be released once the family is notified.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration is investigating.

Stillwater Mining is the country's only producer of platinum and palladium. Its Stillwater mine near Nye employs about 900 people.

Beaudry says Monday's day shift has been cancelled but no decision has been made on the night shift. Work at the mine's surface has continued.

UPDATE:

Montana Nov, 3: — A central Montana precious metals mine was under a partial closure order Tuesday as authorities investigated the death of a worker who crashed while driving a piece of equipment 1,200 feet underground.

The victim was identified by Stillwater Mining Company as Dale Alan Madson, 42, a lead equipment operator who had worked at the mine since 2008.

Amy Louviere with the Mine Safety and Health Administration said Madson was killed Monday afternoon as he was driving a piece of mine equipment with an enclosed cab that went into a ditch. A rock bolt struck Madson in the neck, she said.

Underground work at the mine was suspended Tuesday as the accident was under review by the company and investigators. Work was to resume Tuesday night, although the area of the mine where the accident occurred was to remain closed.

Louviere said there was no end-date on the federal closure order.

Falling Rocks at Kentucky Coal Mine Kills 2 Workers

Extract from JusticeNewsFlash.com

Centertown, KY — A rock slide at a surface coal mine in western Kentucky killed two workers when their truck was crushed under the immense weight of the rocks. The fatal mining accident occurred Friday, October 28, 2011, at

Armstrong Coal's Equity mine in Ohio County at around 6:45 a.m., reported the Washington Post.



The deceased workers have been identified as Darrel Winstead, 47, and Samuel Lindsey, 23. They were reportedly on a blasting crew from MEMSCO, a Dawson Springs-based subsidiary of Midland Powder Co. of Evansville, Ind.

The workers were reportedly driving near a high wall when their truck was buried by rock and earth.

Rescue crews weren't able to reach the trapped workers till around noon, because of the huge pile of rock that rested on top of the truck.

The Ohio County coroner believes the victims were killed instantly.

State officials and the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration are investigating the fatal mining accident.

Quote of the week



"Luck is merely an illusion, trusted by the ignorant and chased by the foolish."

Timothy Zahn
American science fiction writer (1951-)

Wednesday 2 November 2011

China: 18 Confirmed Dead in Coal Mine Accident

Extract from CriEnglish.com

All 18 of the miners who were buried underground after a gas explosion in a coal mine in central China's Henan province six days ago have perished, according to local rescuers.

The accident occurred at the Jiulishan Coal Mine in the city of Jiaozuo shortly after midnight Thursday, when 18 miners were working in the mine, according to a spokesman from the local rescue headquarters.

The mine belongs to the Henan Coal and Chemical Industry Group, the province's largest state-owned mining company.

An initial investigation showed that the mine's managers failed to take preventative measures to eliminate gas explosion risks, according to the spokesman. A further investigation is under way.

Thursday 3 November 2011

UK: Miners trapped as trench collapses

Three men were trapped underground for up to an hour after a cave-in at a colliery.

Rescuers released the three trapped men after a trench collapsed at the Aberpergwm drift mine, in Glynneath, south Wales, just after 3am on Thursday.

"Three people were released, there were two casualties who were taken to hospital," a Mid and West Wales Fire Brigade spokeswoman said. "The third person was released after receiving treatment at the scene."

She added that they were released by a colliery mine rescue crew after being trapped for approximately one hour. Firefighters stood by with lighting equipment and gave assistance until receiving the order to stand down at 5.58am.

A Welsh Ambulance Service spokesman confirmed that two men were taken to Morriston Hospital, Swansea. The extent of their injuries is not known, but they are not believed to be life-threatening.

The colliery cave-in at the Neath Valley drift mine comes seven weeks to the day after the deaths of four miners. Phillip Hill, 45, Garry Jenkins, 39, David Powell, 50, and Charles Breslin, 62, died when water engulfed Gleision Colliery in the neighbouring Swansea Valley. A joint police and Health and Safety Executive investigation into the accident is still under way.

Neath MP Peter Hain expressed concern for the miners injured on Thursday, but said the incident was thankfully not of the same magnitude as the tragedy in Gleision. He said: "Any injury to any miner is a cause for concern. This latest incident is endemic in mining, which is a risky activity. However, it cannot be compared to the tragic disaster which occurred in Gleision.

"Against the backdrop of Gleision people may be understandably more concerned. But Aberpergwm is a modern and efficient mine. Its safety record is admirable and the mine is employing and recruiting more and more people every year."

Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan said her "heart goes out" to the injured men and she is relieved nobody was killed. She said she was concerned that another mining accident had occurred in Neath Port Talbot within "such a short space of time".

Of the two miners admitted to hospital after the accident one has since been discharged after treatment at its A&E unit. A spokeswoman for Morriston Hospital said the second man was in a stable condition.

USA: Congressman to monitor Alpha's mine operations

Extract from CanadianBusiness.com

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — Alpha Natural Resources has promised to end "corrupt

practices" at the former Massey Energy coal mines it now owns, but the senior Democrat on the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce says he sees contradictions in Alpha's conduct and will be watching the company closely.

Virginia-based Alpha has hired several former Massey managers who refused to testify in the investigation of the April 2010 explosion that killed 29 miners at West Virginia's Upper Big Branch Mine. The company also has moved to fight federal sanctions for a potential pattern of safety violations at former Massey mines, U.S. Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., said Tuesday.

In a brief speech on the House floor in Washington, he called those "some troubling contradictions that merit a careful watch."

Alpha spokesman Ted Pile said the former Massey employees were advised by counsel to invoke their Fifth Amendment rights long before Alpha bought the company in June. He said Alpha is committed to working with regulators "with the utmost integrity."

"We also think that those dealings should allow us to appropriately defend ourselves when we believe that there is good reason to do so," he said in an email to The Associated Press.

Miller's comments were prompted by a United Mine Workers of America report last week that labelled the Upper Big Branch disaster "industrial homicide" and demanded criminal prosecution of 18 Massey managers, including former Chief Executive Don Blankenship.

The union's report also recommended 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 the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration for failing to use all the tools it had to shut down the long-troubled mine and prevent the nation's deadliest coal mine explosion in four decades.

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, it has launched a "Running Right" safety program and trained more than 7,500 people.

"Alpha has hired its own team of experts who are thoroughly reviewing the circumstances that precipitated this tragedy, and we have informed Rep. Miller of this fact," Pile said, adding that Alpha is cooperating with other ongoing investigations.

"Our intent is not to defend or pass judgment on anything Massey did in the past at this mine," he said, "but to make sure things are done right and safely in the future."

From Jan. 1, 2009, until the explosion on April 5, 2010, MSHA cited Upper Big Branch for 645 violations and imposed penalties of more than \$1.2 million Massey responded by challenging nearly three-quarters of the fines.

"It is clear that Massey Energy management actively disregarded their workers' health and safety," Miller said. "Unfortunately, the knowing violation of a mandatory health and safety standard is only a misdemeanor, no matter how many miners are killed.

"This kind of conduct needs to be made a felony," he said, "but efforts to increase sanctions have been stifled by the mining industry's lobby."

The Upper Big Branch explosion is the target of continuing criminal investigations, but so far, only one Massey official has been criminally charged.

Former security chief Hughie Elbert Stover was convicted in federal court last week of lying to investigators and ordering a subordinate to destroy thousands of documents after the accident.

The union, an independent panel appointed by former Gov. Joe Manchin and MSHA all agree on what caused the blast. They say 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 traveled seven miles of underground corridors, doubling back on itself and killing men instantly.

Friday 4 November 2011

Chinese mining accident kills 4, traps dozens

Extract from globalpost.com

Officials in China said four miners were killed late Thursday and dozens more trapped in a coal mining accident in the central Henan province.

China mine disaster: Dozens trapped by 'rock burst'



The incident, at the Qianqiu coal mine in the city of Sanmenxia, took place after a sudden burst of rocks trapped the men in the mine shaft Agence France Press reported.

A spokesperson for the state-owned company Henan Yima Coal Mine said 57 miners were still trapped in the mine shaft, but their condition was unclear.

The spokesperson, who declined to be named, told AFP:

"The location of the other miners has been confirmed and we are stepping up rescue efforts."

Separate reports said seven miners had been rescued.

The rock burst happened moments after a small, 2.9 magnitude earthquake shook Sanmenxia city, but it was unclear if the tremor caused the accident, the state news agency Xinhua reported.

The accident comes days after a gas explosion in a state-owned coal mine in neighboring Hunan province killed 29 miners.

USA: Final Sago Mine disaster lawsuits settled

Extract from the Charleston Gazette, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Nearly six years after the Sago Mine disaster, the remaining wrongful-death lawsuits filed by families of the miners who died have been resolved, according to court records filed Friday.

Lawyers for families of six of the miners filed papers indicating they had reached settlements with mine operator Wolf Run Mining Co., and resolved claims against parent company International Coal Group and other defendants.

Terms were not disclosed, but Kanawha Circuit Judge Charles King scheduled a hearing for Nov. 16 to consider approval of the settlements, court officials said. Trial had been scheduled to start in May.

"Right now, the families are focused on completing the steps necessary for the conclusion of the settlements," said Morgantown lawyer Al Karlin, who represented several of the families.

Families of five of the miners killed at Sago had already settled wrongful-death cases against the company, and survivor Randal McCloy Jr. settled a lawsuit filed over injuries he sustained in the disaster.

Technically, the wrongful-death cases involve settlements between the mining company and the estates of the miners who died. The new settlements also resolve two other lawsuits filed

against the mining company by family members other than those administering the estates.

A spokeswoman for Arch Coal, which earlier this year bought ICG, did not respond to a request for comment Friday.

The new settlements were reached by the families of miners Tom Anderson, Jerry Groves, George Hamner, Jerry Jones, Jackie Weaver and Marshall Winans. Previous wrongful-death settlements were reached by the families of miners James Bennett, Marty Bennett, Terry Helms, David Lewis and Fred Ware. The family of one miner who died, Martin Toler, did not sue.

At about 6:30 a.m. on Jan. 2, 2006, an explosion ripped through the Sago Mine south of Buckhannon. One miner, fireboss Terry Helms, died soon after the blast from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Surrounded by smoke and toxic fumes, 12 other miners took shelter behind a makeshift barricade. Eleven of them died before rescuers reached them more than 40 hours later. Only McCloy survived. Before the deaths last year of 29 miners at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, Sago was the worst coal-mining disaster in West Virginia in nearly 40 years.

Federal investigators pointed to a lightning strike as the "most likely" ignition source for the blast, which occurred inside a sealed area of the Sago Mine.

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration concluded that stronger seals, proper methane monitoring and the removal of a pump cable from the sealed area where the explosion occurred could have prevented the disaster. MSHA did not cite ICG or its subsidiary, Wolf Run, with any violations contributing to the accident.

Lawsuits filed by the families had cited a long string of safety violations prior to the disaster, the lack of required anti-lightning equipment, lax methane monitoring and poor construction of the mine seals.

Saturday 5 November 2011

45 rescued from the coal mining accidents in China

Extract from Taiwan News

Forty five miners trapped underground after a rock blast in a Chinese coal mine were brought to the surface Saturday in a rare successful rescue, CCTV state television reported.



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, rescuers carry an injured miner out of the Qianqiu Coal Mine of Yima Coal Group in Sanmenxia City, central China's Henan Province, Friday, Nov. 4, 2011. Rescuers pulled seven injured miners to the surface Friday and were trying to reach 50 others trapped after a rock explosion Thursday in the coal mine, the state media reported. (AP Photo/Xinhua, Zhu Xiang)

Eight people had been confirmed killed by Thursday's accident at the Qianqiu colliery in the central province of Henan, it said. Another 21 had earlier been brought out.

Emergency personnel had to dig a tunnel at a depth of several hundred meters to reach the trapped men, and CCTV showed miners emerging from the colliery's main lift more than 36 hours after the blast.

Some were still wearing their miner's lamps, and all of them looked tired and had blackened faces.

The last miner to be rescued was carried out on a stretcher and immediately taken away by ambulance.

The miners were trapped by a rock burst -- a violent explosion caused by huge pressure -- moments after a minor 2.9 magnitude

earthquake, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

It was not immediately clear whether the earthquake directly caused the accident.

The colliery is part of the Henan Yima Coal Mine Group, a giant state-owned mining company.

While mining accidents are common in China, it is unusual for so many people to be successfully brought to the surface alive. The operation is the most successful such effort in the country since April 2010, when 115 miners were rescued after eight days trapped underground at a mine in northern China.

In October last year 33 workers trapped underground for 69 days in a mine under Chile's Atacama Desert were pulled out in a dramatic 22-hour rescue.

The incident was the latest to hit the hazardous mining industry in China, and came days after a gas explosion at a state-owned coal mine in neighbouring Hunan province left 29 miners dead.

Earlier in October, blasts at mines in the southwestern city of Chongqing and the northern province of Shaanxi killed 13 and 11 miners respectively.

In 2010, 2,433 people died in coal mining accidents in China, according to official statistics.

China's rapid economic growth has caused demand for energy, including coal, to surge. Critics say some mining bosses have put the safety of workers at risk in their pursuit of profit.

Monday 7 November 2011

S.Africa: Fatal accident at Harmony mine

Extract from BusinessReport, Za

Harmony Gold Mining Company (HAR) said on Monday that it regretted to advise that an employee died following an accident in the shaft

at the landing on 73 level at its Kusasaletu mine near Carltonville.

Investigations are currently underway to establish the cause of the accident and all operations at the mine have been suspended until investigations have been completed, it said.

Harmony's CEO Graham Briggs and his management team expressed their sincere condolences to the families and colleagues of the deceased.



CEO of Harmony Gold Graham Briggs

USA: Managers blamed for Nev. mine deaths

Extract from www.foxnews.com

RENO, Nev. – Two Nevadans were killed in a mining accident partly because someone wedged a broom handle against a reset button to bypass an alarm that would have shut down the system, federal safety investigators said.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration said Monday that managers of Barrick Goldstrike's Meikle Mine are responsible for the August 2010 accident in Carlin that killed Daniel Noel, 47, and Joel "Ethan" Schorr, 38.

The two Spring Creek men were struck by a pipe that gave way in a ventilation shaft because it was clogged with excessive waste rock material.

MSHA said the pipe overfilled because the broom handle kept the loading system from tripping off. The agency blames managers for

failing to ensure the safe operation, inspection and maintenance of the mine.

"Management failed to ensure that the pipe, its support system, and electrical system were maintained in a safe condition to protect all persons who could be exposed to a hazard from any failure of the system," MSHA said in the new report issued Monday.

"Additionally, management failed to maintain the electrical sensors and alarm systems and ensure that these systems could not be bypassed. A broom handle was used to wedge the electrical control panel reset button so the aggregate delivery system would continue to operate and not trip out," the report said.

MSHA issued Toronto-based Barrick six safety violations as a result of the accident. MSHA terminated the last of the safety orders stemming from those violations on June 21 after Barrick constructed a new aggregate delivery system that eliminated the hazards, the agency said.

Amy Louviere, a spokeswoman for MSHA's parent Labor Department in Washington, said now that the investigative report is complete, MSHA officials will begin to consider what, if any, fines are warranted for each of the six safety violations.

Fines can range anywhere from \$60 to \$220,000 per violation, Louviere said. Once notified of an assessment, a company has 30 days to either pay it or contest it, she said.

Greg Lang, president of Barrick Gold of North America, said the findings "affirm Barrick's belief that every accident is preventable."

"While we have made great progress over many years at Barrick, this tragic accident reminds all of us that we have yet to achieve our goal of zero accidents and zero injuries," Lang said in a statement on Monday. He said the company will thoroughly review MSHA's report "to identify actions that need to be taken to prevent a similar accident at Meikle or any other Barrick mine."

"Nothing can compensate for the impact that the loss of Dan Noel and Ethan Schorr has had on their loved ones and everyone who knew them, and our thoughts and prayers remain with their families," he said.

The men were being lowered in the cage to inspect the pipe when the accident occurred about 2 a.m. on Aug. 12, 2010. Rescue crews found their bodies 32 hours later at an area about 1,300 feet below ground at the mine about 55 miles northwest of Elko and 275 miles northeast of Reno.

It marked the sixth and seventh fatalities at the mine since it opened in 1994.

One worker told investigators he had been asked to be on lookout on the day shift before the accident "because another employee had wedged a broom handle against the electrical control panel reset button and he wanted to be alerted if a supervisor was approaching," MSHA's report said.

MSHA investigators discovered a modified broom handle hidden near the instrument panel reset button.

"The end of the broom handle had been shaped with a notch of the correct size to allow it to be used to jam the panel reset button," the report said. "Investigators positioned the broom handle and found it to fit perfectly when wedged between an electrical junction box and the instrument panel reset button."

S.Africa: Operations at Crocodile River Mine Suspended After Fatal Accident

Extract from MarketWatch.com, Canada

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, -- Mr. Ian Rozier, President and CEO of Eastern Platinum Limited, reports that mining operations at the Crocodile River Mine ("CRM") have been suspended following a fatal accident at the mine.

Mr. Afiach Ngobeni, an employee of High Point Trading (an engineering company doing

development work at CRM), was fatally injured in a blasting accident at an ore pass development raise at the Zandfontein Section at CRM on Monday 7th November.

A Section 54 Stop Work Order has been issued by the Development of Mineral Resources ("DMR") and mining operations at CRM have been stopped pending a full investigation by the DMR Inspector of Mines on Tuesday November 8th.

"This is terrible news for the families affected and also for the Company. Management has made health and safety a key priority at CRM and we were making substantial progress in this regard, having recorded 3.8 million fatality free shifts at the mine until yesterday. This is a tragic accident and it will be investigated thoroughly," stated Ian Rozier.

USA: Officials Release ID of Miner Killed in Letcher County Accident

Extract from LEX18.com

Officials have identified the miner killed Monday morning in an accident at the Hubble Mining Company No. 9 mine at Eolia in Letcher County as 47-year-old Jerry Britton of Pound, Va. Britton was a mine foreman.

Initial reports from investigators of the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing (OSML) indicate Britton died when struck by a personnel carrier in the underground mine. The accident was reported at 9:40 a.m. Britton was taken to Whitesburg Regional Hospital, where he was pronounced dead from his injuries.

Because of the recent increase in both surface and underground mining accidents, OMSL Director Johnny Greene says he will instruct mine safety analysts to provide enhanced on-site training and safety reminders to miners and mine operators throughout the state beginning Monday of next week. Green says he hopes to make miners more aware of safety issues that have resulted in the increase in accidents.

Hubble's No. 9 mine has had two accidents this year, including in July when a worker was injured by a hydraulic jack, according to federal data. The mine is closed pending an investigation.

This is the 18th U.S. coal-mining fatality in 2011, and Kentucky now leads the nation with 7 deaths, just ahead of West Virginia, with 6.

Tuesday 8 November 2011

Nevada Gold Mine Blamed for Deaths of Two Workers

Extract from www.fairwarning.org

Regulators have blamed managers of the world's biggest gold mining company in the deaths last year of two Nevada workers.

In an investigative report posted Monday, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration faulted managers of Toronto-based Barrick Gold for, among other things, allowing a safety alarm system at the Meikle Mine in Carlin, Nev. to be bypassed. The agency said Daniel Noel, 47, and Joel "Ethan" Schorr, 38, were killed in August, 2010, after a pipe clogged with rock waste collapsed and struck the two men.

The alarm system that should have signaled that the pipe was clogged, and shut down its operations, was bypassed by someone who wedged a broom handle against a reset button.

As The Associated Press reports, the deaths brought to seven the number of fatalities at the eastern Nevada mining site since it opened in 1994.

MSHA cited Barrick for six safety violations as a result of the accident, but it terminated the last of its safety orders on June 21 after the company built a new delivery system that, the agency said, eliminated the hazards.

Those dangers existed, the agency said in its report, because "management failed to ensure that the pipe, its support system, and electrical system were maintained in a safe condition to

protect all persons who could be exposed to a hazard from any failure of the system."

"Additionally, management failed to maintain the electrical sensors and alarm systems and ensure that these systems could not be bypassed," the report added.

An MSHA spokeswoman said now that the investigative report is complete, MSHA officials will begin to consider what fines are warranted. They can range from \$60 to \$220,000 per violation.

Greg Lang, president of Barrick Gold of North America, said the findings "affirm Barrick's belief that every accident is preventable."

"This tragic accident reminds all of us that we have yet to achieve our goal of zero accidents and zero injuries," he added. Lang pledged that the company will review the investigative report "to identify actions that need to be taken to prevent a similar accident at Meikle or any other Barrick mine."

According to the Hoover's Inc. business information website, the Barrick Goldstrike Mines in Nevada, which include Meikle, are the company's largest gold-producing operation.

Thursday 10 November 2011

NZ: Charges laid over Pike River mine disaster

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Charges have been laid against three parties in connection with the deadly Pike River mine disaster in New Zealand.

It has been almost a year since 29 miners and contractors were killed in the mining accident.

The men died when a series of explosions rocked the underground coal mine on the west coast of the South Island last November.

The labour department says it has laid 25 charges against three parties.

It has not named the parties or the charges, saying it does not want to identify those being prosecuted as they are entitled to name suppression.

But the department says it realises the high public interest in the case and is taking urgent measures to try to publish names where possible.

Each of the charges carries a maximum penalty of \$190,000.

The Pike River Royal Commission will next week begin its third phase of hearings. Its final report is due by April.

The disaster, caused by a build up of methane in the mine, claimed the lives of 24 New Zealanders, two Australians, two Britons and a South African man.

Their remains are still entombed about 2.5 kilometres into the colliery, with recovery teams so far unable to reach them because of fears volatile gases remain in the mine shaft.

An inquest into the deaths found the miners probably died during or soon after the first explosion in the mine on November 19 last year.

Sunday 13 November 2011

Death toll rises to 34 in China mine accident

Extract from boston.com

Thirty-four miners are now confirmed dead in a gas leak at a coal mine in southwestern China. Another nine miners are still trapped.

A powerful gas leak hit one underground platform of the Sizhuang Coal Mine in Yunnan province on Thursday and spread to another platform, trapping 43 miners.

It was China's second deadly mining accident in less than a week. China's coal mines are the deadliest in the world.

The duty official at the Yunnan Provincial Work Safety Administration said Sunday that 34

miners were confirmed dead and that the search for the missing nine continues. He refused to give his name, as is common with Chinese officials.

Monday 14 November 2011

Pike River Coal 'ignored warnings'

Extract from The Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Qld

JOSH Ufer, a 25-year-old miner from Central Queensland, perished in the Pike River mine disaster in Greymouth, New Zealand.

As the anniversary of the explosions which killed 29 men approaches, Josh's mum Jo talks about her determination to have her son's remains removed from their mountain tomb and returned to CQ.

Part one of her story appeared in The Morning Bulletin on Saturday and told how the young miner was anxious to come home to Queensland and had complained to his family about safety standards at the coal mine.



Jo at home in Zilzie with a plaque commemorating her son.

Jo said the only reason he was in the mine when the first explosion occurred was that there had been a power failure on the Monday and he was making up for lost time.

In the 12 months since the accident, the mining company has gone into receivership and a Royal Commission has heard evidence from former employees who quit because of safety concerns.

"It appears that a number of men had spoken out, but the company had ignored warnings. If it had taken notice and acted, rather than simply trying to grab what it could, it might have saved 29 lives."

She says Greymouth is still a grief-stricken community where there is plenty of anger and a determination to get to the bottom of the how and why it happened. "We still don't know what caused the initial explosion. Was it a push for production or was it just really slack safety? Who is to blame?"

There are several potential buyers manoeuvring to buy the mine to reopen it, but Jo, who met New Zealand Prime Minister John Key, says the families are demanding that any deal includes a plan to recover the bodies so they can receive a proper farewell.

"My number one priority in all this is to get Josh out.

"My personal opinion is that I would like to see people face criminal charges. It's a crime scene and there has to be every possible effort to get in there and find out what happened."

The Royal Commission is expected to sit until the middle of next year, and on Thursday the first 25 charges connected to the disaster were laid against three un-named parties in Greymouth.

Jo has established a small memorial to her lost son in the back garden of her house in Zilzie.

She remembers him, she says, as a quiet, well-behaved child who grew into a fun-loving man

who loved his life, loved Australia and loved Queensland.

"He was such fun to be around. His sister, Kimberley, is still devastated. He was her big brother, her best friend."

And yet, out of the tragedy, Jo has received the gift of a beautiful grandchild, the daughter Josh will never see.

Erika lives with Rachel in New Zealand but recently spent a month at Zilzie.

"I like to think I can see a resemblance."

China Mining Accident: Boss Smears Coal on Face, Pretends to Have Been in Exploded Mine

Extract from huffingtonpost.com



BEIJING — Chinese police detained a mine boss who smeared coal on his face to pretend he had been in the shaft where 34 miners died and nine are still trapped, state media said Monday.

Mine bosses who don't go underground with their workers face severe punishments under a rule imposed last year to improve safety. Chinese mines are still the world's most dangerous, though death rates have been lowered significantly.

A powerful gas leak at the Sizhuang Coal Mine in Yunnan province Thursday trapped 43 miners. Thirty-four bodies have been recovered, while rescuers were still trying to reach nine miners still trapped Monday. Gas inside the mine and the risk of explosions were hampering efforts, Xinhua News Agency said.

The People's Daily reported that Qi Guming, deputy head of the coal mine, has been taken

into custody on suspicion of faking evidence, citing a briefing by the rescue command office.

After the accident, Qi "rushed down the shaft and smeared coal on his face to pretend he had escaped from underground," the newspaper said. "On Sunday ... the public security authority confirmed that Qi did not go down the shaft on that day, and made false claims to the rescue command office."

The regulation that took effect last year calls for mines that violate the rules to pay between 150,000 and 5 million yuan (\$22,400 to \$750,000) in fines, depending on whether the mine also suffers serious accidents. Bosses can be fined between 10,000 yuan (\$1,500) and up to 80 percent of their income from the previous year and face a lifetime ban on mine supervision work.

Xinhua has said that the Sizhuang Coal Mine's license was revoked in April and that it was operating illegally.

The incident was China's second deadly mining accident in less than a week. In the previous accident, eight miners died and 52 were rescued from a mine in Henan province after a cave-in.

And on Monday, rescuers were pumping water out of a coal mine that flooded early Sunday in northwestern Gansu province, trapping seven workers. The miners still have not been located and it is not known whether they are alive, Xinhua quoted Fan Shijie, chief of the local work safety supervisory management bureau, as saying.

Fan said coal mine managers there failed to work underground as required, and further investigation was under way.

China closed many smaller, illegal mines in recent years as part of its safety efforts. Annual fatalities are now about one-third of the high of nearly 7,000 in 2002.

S.Africa: First Uranium announces fatal accident at Ezulwini Mine

Extract from The Sacramento Bee

TORONTO AND JOHANNESBURG, - It is with deep regret that First Uranium Corporation today announced that a fall of ground has claimed the life of an underground employee at its Ezulwini Mine. The incident occurred on 48 level in an O-line stoping panel.

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

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

Tuesday 15 November 2011

Coal Miner Dies Two Weeks after Accident; Death is Kentucky's Fourth in Three Weeks

Extract from WFPL News

A Harlan County coal miner has died from injuries he sustained weeks ago in a surface mining accident. Twenty-eight-year-old David Middleton died in a hospital yesterday.

Middleton of Baxter was injured two weeks ago when a bulldozer he was driving overturned on a Harlan County surface mine. Middleton was working to reclaim the Mill Branch Mine, which is owned by Nally and Hamilton.

Middleton's death is the eighth coal mine-related fatality in Kentucky this year. Half of those deaths have happened during the past three weeks. The Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing plans to conduct enhanced on-site

training this week to increase awareness of the issues that have contributed to the recent accidents.

Thursday 17 November 2011

Pike River: Former inspector denies he was lax on safety

Extract from nzherald.co.nz

A former mines inspector has angrily rejected suggestions he was lax on safety problems seen in the lead up to a deadly explosion in the Pike River Coal mine.

Former New Zealand mine inspector Kevin Poynter is giving evidence to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Pike River mine disaster this afternoon.



Kevin Poynter, former Health and Safety Inspector, Department of Labour. Photo / supplied

Pike River Coal counsel Stacey Shortall questioned his concern about the company labelling a ventilation shaft as a second emergency mine exit.

She said Mr Poynter waited months before following up on his concerns about the shaft, despite his repeatedly labeling it an inadequate second egress during the inquiry.

Mr Poynter said he was dealing with an "impossible" workload and personal issues leading up to the Pike River disaster.

"There were other things I was doing all through that period including... dealing with the loss of a grandson.

"So I find it a little bit rich... to suggest that I wasn't following up because I wasn't concerned about it."

Mr Poynter admitted no-one at Pike River Coal had refused him information about the state of the mine's operations.

He had taken accompanied Government minister Kate Wilkinson on a tour of the mine in 2009 without raising safety concerns.

But he said it was the owners' primary responsibility to make sure the mine was safe.

"They have prime responsibility to ensure if people are entering their mine that it's safe to do so.

"It should have been the highest priority to Pike River. They're the ones in charge of the workplace... not the inspectors."

Inspectors should have used enforcement

Earlier, Mr Poynter said enforcement action should have been taken over the lack of an adequate second exit to the Pike River Coal mine.

Under questioning from counsel acting for the families of the Pike River dead, he said miners had nowhere to go in the event of an explosion.

They would not have been able to ascend a shaft deemed the mine's second means of egress as it would have been venting gas, he said.

He said in hindsight it would have been better for inspectors to use enforcement powers to ensure Pike River built an adequate second exit to its mine.

Mr Poynter said his high workload often saw him ask mines to investigate safety failures and make improvements without his oversight.

Inspectors never saw Pike River log books

Mr Poynter yesterday revealed he had not seen a long list of serious safety issues at the Pike River Coal mine.

He told the inquiry he had carried out seven underground mining inspections from 2008, gaining only a "snapshot". In 2009, he carried out only one inspection.

Royal Commission lawyer James Wilding revealed methane levels in the top of the fan shaft had spiked several times, with a cluster in October 2010, a month before the explosion.

This meant methane levels would have been even higher inside the mine itself.

Mr Poynter said he could not give that the urgent attention it needed because the company never told him, even though they should have been notifiable events.

It showed the mine was having issues controlling gas and with ventilation, he said. Documents also suggest Pike River Coal deliberately drew fresh air across a gas sensor, and in another case blew compressed air on to one. Mr Poynter learned of this today.

"With the benefit of hindsight, I look at these ... high potential incidents ... it just seems to me that these issues need to be out so we can see them and deal with them."

He was also unaware the company's own logs reported the ventilation fan had gone off repeatedly in May 2010, machinery cut-off switches were not working (possibly deliberately), and some phones were out of order. Mr Poynter said he had not picked up a phone to check if they were working.

The methane drainage was blowing out because of problems with water traps, and a roadway was a "bloody mess" with trip hazards.

Just before his last visit, on November 2, the mine had recorded lots of methane around the underground machinery.

Mr Poynter did not know a cigarette lighter had been found in a vehicle, cigarette butts in the mine, and aluminium drink-can tabs. However, it kept happening so random searches were introduced.

On one visit, he did notice a 'dead man' lever on a bolting machine had been tied down, disabling a safety device.

Rather than investigate, he requested mine manager Doug White investigate.

"The deputy was suspended and ultimately was dismissed."

Mr Poynter never inspected the main fan, and only inspected the accident register on one visit.

The Department of Labour's two inspectors reported to different managers, one of whom had no coal background.

"There was no co-ordinated approach", Mr Poynter said.

Family members present today were clearly distressed as the number of unreported incidents piled up.

Feds find mining company at fault for worker's death in 60-foot fall

Extract from Anchorage Daily News

FAIRBANKS -- A federal agency has determined a mining company is to blame for a June accident in which a 39-year-old worker was killed.

The U.S. Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration reported Thursday that Michael J. Murray died because Fairbanks Gold Mining Inc. failed to have procedures in place that would have prevented the death at the Fort Knox mine.

Murray died while sweeping in the crusher building, falling 60 feet through a maintenance hatch. The hatch cover had been removed eight days before to increase ventilation. Investigators say there were no warning signs or handrails on one side of the open hatch. Corrective actions have been taken.

Fort Knox spokeswoman Lorna Shaw says they will contest the findings, and added the

conclusions didn't match those of their internal investigation.

Friday 18 November 2011

NZ: Pike River 'an accident waiting to happen'

Extract from www.3news.co.nz

An expert in human factors told the Pike River Royal Commission of Inquiry today that hazard reports at the mine show the tragedy was “an accident waiting to happen”.

Dr Kathleen Callaghan, director of human factors at the University of Auckland, says repeated low level housekeeping, maintenance, and ventilation issues would have increased the chance of an accident at the mine.



[Dr Kathleen Callaghan says evidence suggests New Zealand has learnt nothing from the Erebus disaster](#)

She said a lot of hazards, incidents and accidents recorded at Pike River “go way beyond slips, trips and falls”.

Dr Callaghan's analysis of causal factors that led to the tragedy is based on her research into why human errors occur.

She said the fact that problems kept on being repeated indicates there was either no follow-up action at Pike River, or the action taken was inappropriate to prevent problems arising again.

The commission was told by Dr Callaghan that evidence suggests New Zealand has learned nothing from the Erebus disaster.

She says understanding and applying the theory of human factors is critical to safety in the workplace.

Under questioning from the miners' union EPMU, Dr Callaghan was asked if the apparent antipathy of Pike River boss Peter Whittall towards the union was of concern to her.

She told the commission that kind of management culture was a concern from the top going down.

“There is an expression that a fish rots from the head,” she said.

In her cross-examination, counsel for the directors and managers of Pike River, Stacey Shortall questioned Dr Callaghan's choice of words about the rotting fish and queried the witness' knowledge and understanding of underground coal mining.

She highlighted that Dr Callaghan had never visited a West Coast mine and had no expertise in respect to the mining industry.

“I'm not saying I'm an expert in mining safety in any way,” said Dr Callaghan.

She acknowledged her analysis was based on a snapshot of information from Pike River, and the commission said it understood that.

In response to the Department of Labour evidence given earlier in the week, Dr Callaghan said she does not see how the inspectors could have known if Pike River was compliant, without the use of an audit system.

She told the commission, inspectors should have a high level of leadership and interpersonal skills, the ability to deal with stress and high level analytical skills.

She also said inspectors needed access to legal advice at the end of the phone.

The third phase of the inquiry continues on Monday November 21 at 11.30am.

USA: Hecla Reports Accident at the Lucky Friday Mine

Extract from MarketWatch.com

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho, -- Hecla Mining Company reports an accident occurred at its Lucky Friday mine in Northern Idaho on November 17, 2011.

The accident occurred as part of the construction of the #4 Shaft at the Lucky Friday operation. Two contractors were involved in the accident during routine activities involving the construction of a 16-foot diameter underground rock bin (a storage area for broken rock). The work involved drilling, blasting, and mucking of rock into a previously constructed area. Both men were believed to be wearing all required personal protection equipment, including fall protection. For reasons that are unknown at this time, the two men were drawn into material that was moving underneath them. Both contractors were removed from the area and transported to the hospital, and one has been released. All personnel are accounted for.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and for a safe recovery of the injured contractor," said Phil Baker, President and Chief Executive Officer. "Operating our mines safely is a top priority for Hecla, and we will continue to work to prevent such incidents from occurring."

The accident is being investigated by the Company and representatives from the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration. The workers' families have been notified. The Lucky Friday mine has temporarily ceased mining to investigate this accident.

Saturday 19 November 2011

UK: Family wants miner son's body home

Extract from UKAP

The father of a man killed in a mining accident in New Zealand has said he hopes to bring his son

home to be buried as it approaches the first anniversary of the disaster.

Malcolm Campbell, 25, from St Andrews in Fife, was one of 29 miners killed in the Pike River mine on November 19 last year. Pete Rodger, 40, from Perthshire, was also killed.

Saturday marks a year since the mine, in Atarau on the country's South Island, was rocked by an explosion, trapping the 29 men. A second major explosion five days later dashed hopes that any of the workers had survived.

Pike River Coal, the company running the mine, was forced into bankruptcy in the weeks following the disaster. The mine is still up for sale.

New Zealand's government has said any buyer must try to recover the miners' bodies, still trapped because of fears that the atmosphere in the mine remains unstable.

Mr Campbell's father, also called Malcolm, said four bids for the mine had since been tendered, offering hope that he, his wife Jane and their family can finally lay their son to rest in Scotland.



Malcolm Campbell and his wife Jane hope to bring their son, who died in a New Zealand mining disaster last year, home to be buried

He said: "For me and Jane, coming up to the end of the year, we are just looking to get some kind of answers and some kind of closure. But that's not going to be until we get Malcolm home.

"We have not had a lot of closure at all with his body still down there. It has been a hard year. Our focus has been just to try to keep the pressure on to bring Malcolm home."

The New Zealand government has filed 25 criminal charges on alleged health and safety violations relating to the mine explosion. Each charge carries a maximum fine of 250,000 New Zealand dollars (£122,000). An official investigation into the disaster is continuing in the country.

Around 2,500 people are expected to pay tribute to the dead miners in a ceremony in New Zealand on Saturday. A private ceremony will also be held for the families of the miners and an official memorial will be unveiled. The event will end with a period of silence at 3.44pm New Zealand time, when the first explosion occurred one year ago.

Doco raised safety questions prior to Pike River

Extract from www.3news.co.nz

Today is the anniversary of the Pike River disaster and since then serious questions have been raised about mine safety.

But those same questions were raised in a student documentary two years before the explosion that claimed 29 lives.

I was one of two broadcasting school students who made *Digging Your Own Grave*.

At the time of making this documentary, nearly 200 people had been killed in mines on the West Coast.

But there was an ominous warning that that tally could rise.

Glen Campbell from a mining union features and said then that it was his belief, shared by many, that production comes before safety.

Les Neilson, a miner, says there is a thing called 'near misses'.

"Well hardly anyone ever records a near miss."

Mining widow Valma McGowan says every day "I have miners tell me about incidents at local mines that go unreported to the authorities".

"Where people have been hurt, where people have nearly lost their lives."

One of the main concerns raised was a lack of regulation.

Back in 1992 the government axed most of the rules which looked after miners and replaced them with a generic Health and Safety Act.

"I think the Health and Safety Act was one of the worst things that happened in New Zealand. It took away the mines act and replaced them with just those few words," said Mr Neilson.

Those few words meant mine check inspectors, specialist miners that were based at mines and responsible for safety, were replaced by staff in Wellington at the Department of Labour.

"They've had unqualified people they've appointed as inspectors that haven't had the qualifications at all to do the job," said Mr Neilson.

The mining union called for check inspectors to be reinstated.

Even mines rescue staff, expressed safety concerns. Stan Alder from Mines Rescue Service says there has got to be a balance running a mine operation profitably, "I mean there's no point in running a business and losing money".

"But you've got to weigh that up against the cost of the consequences of something going horribly wrong."

A balance that did not exist back then, according to Mr Alder.

At the time, we wanted to put all the safety concerns raised, to the Department of Labour. But they would not front. After all, we were just students.

"There's no doubt in my mind there'll be another serious mining accident," says Ms McGowan. "I

hope to god there isn't but I have no doubt in my mind there will be if changes aren't made.”

Almost two years after those words were spoken the explosion at Pike River Mine occurred.

Now, 29 lives later, mine safety is top of the agenda.

S.Africa: Update on accident at Kusasaletu

Extract from www.4-traders.com

Johannesburg: Harmony Gold Mining Company Limited regrets to advise that the fall of ground accident, that occurred at its Kusasaletu mine near Carletonville on Wednesday, has resulted in the death of the trapped miner.

Despite on-going rescue efforts to find the trapped miner, management advised this morning that it is unlikely that the miner has survived the accident. The rescue team will continue to search for the body of the deceased.

Investigations are currently underway to establish the cause of the accident. All operations at the mine have been suspended until investigations have been completed.

Harmony's Chief Executive Officer, Graham Briggs and his management team express their sincere condolences to the families and colleagues of the deceased.

Sunday 20 November 2011

Konkola Copper miner died after an accident in Zambia

Extract from [SteelGuru](http://SteelGuru.com), Zambia

A Miner working for Konkola Copper mine in Zambia, a unit of London listed Vendata Resources died on November 18th 2011 after an accident that occurred at the place of work in the copper rich region of the country.

Mr Charles Mwila an Artisan Foreman Electrical died on November 18th 2011 following an incident at Konkola Mine in Chililabombwe, one of the company's key mining operations on the

copper rich region of the Southern African country.

Ms Joy Sata Mwila spokeswoman of Konkola Copper Mine, said Mr Mwila was involved in an accident on November 9th 2011 where he sustained burns after a power outage which affected Lusaka, copperbelt and other parts of the country. After the incident, Mr Mwila was evacuated to South Africa for specialized treatment where he met his demise on November 18th 2011.

KCM, Zambia's leading copper miner by output, has regretted the death arising from the incident and extended its heartfelt sympathy to the deceased's family. Burial arrangements will be announced later.

KCM, has been renowned for its up to date standards of safety at all its operations and has in recent years been prioritizing safety to ensure both the labor force and its equipment was secured to ensure maximum production of the copper metal.

USA: Lucky Friday miner dead

Extract from [The Spokesman Review](http://TheSpokesmanReview.com)

For the second time this year, a miner has died after sustaining injuries while working at Hecla's Lucky Friday mine.

Brandon Lloyd Gray, 26, was critically injured Thursday while working at the Mullan, Idaho mine. He died early this morning.

A second miner injured in the accident was treated at a hospital and released.

Thursday's accident comes seven months after Mullan mourned the loss of another Lucky Friday miner. In April, Larry "Pete" Marek was killed when his work area caved in and he was buried under a large rock pile.

Gray, who had been mining since 2008, was working underground when he was trapped in a broken rock bin that was being excavated as a part of the No. 4 shaft project, according to his employer, Cementation U.S.A. The bin had

become plugged and when miners dislodged the materials, Gray was engulfed.

Hecla contracted Cementation U.S.A. to carry out the No. 4 shaft project, a \$200 million project that will deepen the mine nearly 9,000 feet, and Cementation has been operating at the site since 2009. Hecla officials expect the project to be completed by 2014.

"The whole Cementation family is grieving this terrible loss, and our immediate focus is on supporting Brandon's family with our assistance and our prayers," Cementation U.S.A. President Mike Nadon said in a news release.

Following April's fatal accident, federal investigators said work practices had led to Marek's death. Hecla was cited for unsafe ground conditions at the Lucky Friday mine during inspections in May, June and August.

A team of Mine Safety and Health Administration representatives and Cementation U.S.A.'s management group are investigating the most recent accident. Cementation officials say the miners involved in Thursday's accident were wearing proper safety gear.

NZ: Families focus on the bodies

Extract from stuff.co.nz

A desperate plea has rung out to the nation from yesterday's emotional first anniversary of the Pike River coalmine disaster.



Speaker after speaker called for the 29 dead men's bodies to be returned home.

"Every last one," a family member called from the crowd as Ngati Waewae kaumatua Ben Hutana opened the service with a mihi and mentioned body recovery.

The sun shone as it did for the memorial service two tough weeks after the first fatal explosion last November 19 at the West Coast coalmine.

Again, the community turned out in large numbers, with more than 2000 flocking to Greymouth's Rugby Park to pay tribute alongside several hundred Pike family members. Grief remained as raw as a year ago for many and tears flowed freely.

A poignant reminder was the 29 blue miners' helmets and other personal touches on a table in front of the Pike River families.

Eerily, immediately after yesterday's two minutes' silence, which began at 3.44pm to mark the time of the first explosion, the sun went behind a cloud and a chill briefly descended before it returned.

But the mood was different than at the Omoto service last December 2.

The families and the community seemed more determined, more united.

They want action.

As spokesman for some of the Pike families, Bernie Monk, told the crowd: "Whatever happens here, we're going to fight right to the end till we get our guys out.

"We need the community's help on this and I ask for it today."

Monk, whose son, Michael, 23, was one of the 29 dead, asked the West Coast to keep supporting the Pike families to get through "this ordeal".

"Without your help, we would have never got through this year and it looks to me like it's going to be a long journey ahead," he said, his voice choked with emotion.

He told of visiting the mine yesterday morning and staring down its entrance, seeing his son's face.

"I offered a prayer for him and for all the other tragedies that we've had to put up with on the West Coast. The Brunner, the Strongman, the Pike and all the other people who have died in mine tragedies."

Monk called for the community to support the families and mining unions in their push to ensure such tragedies never happened again.

The crowd gave him a standing ovation at the end of his speech.

Archdeacon Tim Wallace said most first anniversaries marked a time of closure but that was not the case yesterday because there was "still unfinished business".

The Royal Commission, the police investigation, the Labour Department's prosecution and the mine's uncertain future were yet to be resolved, he said.

"But most importantly, the men who went underground this day a year ago are still there and for many, that means that you are unable to move forward in your grief. You're trapped, you're waiting agonisingly for the wheels of progress to turn and for uncertainty to end so that you can complete your duty of care for loved ones."

Wallace said the community had a "moral responsibility" to bring the men home and urged the powers-to-be to make that happen.

Archdeacon Richard Wallace agreed, saying: "We wait expectantly for the return of their remains so that we can give them the dignified farewell that they so richly deserve."

New Zealand's new governor-general, Sir Jerry Mateparae, said yesterday's anniversary was about reflecting on the events of last November 19.

"One year has passed since we lost those men. One year has passed since the families and

communities those men belonged to had their lives changed forever. One year on and there remain many questions to be answered," Mateparae said.

"Today, we also remember that the 29 men still lie in the mine."

He said processes were under way to find out what happened and to learn lessons from, which would honour the men and give comfort and hope to their families.

Grey District mayor Tony Kokshoorn was frank with his words: "One year later, we have our 29 men still in the mountain. We never expected that."

He said there had to be accountability for what happened that dreadful day.

"We want closure. We want our men back."

Prime Minister John Key spoke briefly to read excerpts from Psalm 10 of the Bible.

Labour leader Phil Goff was on stage but did not address the crowd.

It was deeply poignant to listen to Tracy Cameron sing "Bensong", her moving tribute to her dead stepson, Benjamin Rockhouse, 21.

And Alisha Osborne, the teenage daughter of Grey District councillor Milton Osborne, who died in the mine, hauntingly sang "In the Arms of an Angel", accompanied by Carol Rose on guitar, mother of Stuart Mudge, who also was killed.

At the end of the service, family members, dignitaries and the public were invited to place a piece of coal, some dug from Pike River, into the back of a Chevy truck to symbolise letting go of some pain.

The truck was owned by one of the miners with "our 29" as its number plate.

Earlier yesterday morning, about 180 family and supporters went by bus to the mine in the Paparoa Range, about 46km northeast of Greymouth.

They laid wreaths and were driven to its entrance to peer into the dark tunnel.

Later, about 250 family and friends attended the private opening of a memorial garden at Atarau, near the turn-off to Pike River.

At 1.30pm yesterday, a granite stone memorial bearing the names of the 29 men entombed in the mine was unveiled in Greymouth by Key and former chief mines inspector Harry Bell.

The garden around it held 29 red roses and 29 white roses.

Bell was applauded by the families when he promised he "would not rest" until the bodies were recovered.

As Kokshoorn said: "This is a symbol of our men that are still lying up there in the mine."

Monday 21 November 2011

Mining safety campaigner named WA local hero

Extract from ABC Esperance, Aus

Helen Fitzroy lost her husband in a mining accident 20 years ago. Last year she founded support organisation Miners' Promise and has been named WA Local Hero of the year for her work.

Mrs Fitzroy said being announced as the WA Local Hero of the year on Saturday night made her feel "totally overwhelmed".

"It's such an honour, but it's also an extreme responsibility that I felt."

Helen Fitzroy lost her husband Steve in a rockfall at a gold mine in Norseman in Western Australia in 1991, leaving her a widow with three young children.

"He was an airleg miner and he had expressed some concerns just prior as to the events at that particular site not being particularly safe."

"We'd actually taken a couple of week's holiday and he'd only been back at work a week when this tragedy unfolded."

"Initially I was overwhelmingly grief-stricken. I suppose it was quite normalised then, it just twenty years ago that these sorts of thing happen, particularly within the mining industry."



Helen Fitzroy, WA Local Hero (Supplied)

"There wasn't any support given as such."

Mrs Fitzroy, who now lives in Esperance, spent years fighting for financial assistance and compensation and said she felt very isolated.

"I found the quagmires of bureaucratic processes were overwhelmingly difficult and information was scarce."

She was inspired to set up Miners' Promise last year when she met other families of mine accident victims, who were also in need of support.

"It alarmed me hugely that very little had changed, which was really the driving force behind me doing something about that."

"There are many gaps in terms of the support that's offered to families and I feel very passionate about making sure that the support that we provide through Miners Promise adequately meets families' needs."

"The industry as a whole needs to be aware that we exist."

"I travel extensively around the state and a lot of the people I talk to have never heard of it."

"Once they know about it then they can join."

"It's based on the principle that you help your mates. So while nothing may happen to you it could be that you are assisting somebody else's family."

Since launching in July last year the organisation has already assisted four families who have lost a relative in a mining accident.

"Each of those families has been able to have somebody there to act as an advocate for them, and support them."

Helen Fitzroy is now a finalist in the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2012 in Canberra.

NZ: Pike River inquiry takes close look at hydro-mining

Extract from stuff.co.nz

The coal extraction method used at Pike River coalmine prior to last November's fatal blast is under close examination at the inquiry into the tragedy.

Solid Energy's underground mines' general manager, Craig Smith, has taken the stand this afternoon as an expert to explain hydraulic or hydro-mining methods.

A wide range of specific expertise and experience was necessary to safely extract coal using hydraulic mining, he said.

He said risks included methane management, spontaneous combustion control and safety of the person operating the hydraulic monitor, particularly from large amounts of methane gas being released into the minded if a large rockfall occurs.

At the start of the hearings last Monday, Royal Commission chairman Justice Graham Panckhurst said in a media briefing the goaf or

void left behind after an area was hydro-mined was the most likely source of methane that fuelled the fatal explosion.

Smith told the inquiry hydraulic mining had ceased in Japan and Canada and was only used at a small number of mines in Russia, China and Czechoslovakia.

However, it was ideally suited for West Coast's underground mines.

He will continue giving evidence tomorrow.

Earlier today, mining consultant David Stewart, chairman of Mines Rescue Service Trust, told the inquiry Pike had a "greater level of dysfunction and mistrust" than other mines where he had worked.

"I was not surprised about this because the mine and company were under a lot of public, financial and internal pressure and the turnover of senior and middle management and technical staff aggravated this. I do believe this may have contributed to some of the problems the mine had experienced," he told the Royal Commission into the deaths of 29 men.

The resumed inquiry at Greymouth District Court has begun its second week of phase three hearings, which focus on what happened at the West Coast underground coalmine leading up to the blast.

Stewart was contracted by the mine to undertake 14 compliance audits in February, March and April last year.

It involved auditing compliance on the surface and underground, plus talking with crews, mine officials and trades staff.

His main impression was a sense of pressure to achieve targets.

"This was evident because everybody was aware of the cost of the operation to date, missed targets for development and productions and financial crunch relating to the company as a whole.

"Almost all employees I talked to felt the pressure to perform and to get the mine infrastructure and development places ready for the planned hydro-monitor start-up."

His audits identified a number of safety concerns at Pike River.

That included having a main fan in the underground gassy mine, "uncontrolled" gas drainage discharge, "high risks" of vehicles damaging gas drainage pipes along the mine's roadways and concerns about ventilation management.

Stewart also criticised the mine's 108m ventilation shaft as a second escape route, saying it was "impracticable for a large number of personnel at any one time and only the fittest would escape through this route, particularly while wearing a self rescuer".

He was told a refuge chamber would be moved from the mine's tunnel to closer to the working area.

The inquiry has previously heard no such refuge chamber existed, instead it was a fresh air base where underground staff could access fresh air and change their self-rescuers.

Stewart was also concerned about obstructions and debris accumulated in the roadway leading to the shaft.

"This would have caused high resistance at a time when the mine was struggling for air in the working places, plus it added to fire risk."

The mine had previous frictional ignition incidents caused by sparks from the roadheader machine hitting hard quartzite sandstone, which sometimes intruded into the coal seam.

"These events result in methane catching on fire and burning in the face area."

This was reported to have happened several times the previous year, he said.

He said there was "little room for error" in hydro-monitor coal extraction in gassy mines, such as

Pike River and Spring Creek, unless all the back-up safety systems were well-established.

Many issues raised in his audit were yet to be addressed by the time he left in late April.

Stewart noted Pike River Coal chief executive Peter Whittall was "very much" in charge of the operation, despite recently employing an operations manager and underground mine manager.

Department of Labour is prosecuting Whittall, along with Pike River Coal (in receivership) and Valley Longwall International's in-seam drilling subsidiary, VLI Drilling Pty Ltd, over alleged health and safety failures at the mine.

S.Africa: Impala Platinum, Anooraq report fatal accidents

Extract from www.miningweekly.com

JOHANNESBURG – Three workers died in separate platinum mine accidents in South Africa over the last couple of days, with both Impala Platinum (Implats) and Anooraq on Monday reporting fatalities.

JSE-listed Implats said it had recovered the bodies of two workers who were trapped after a fall-of-ground accident at Impala Rustenburg's 7 Shaft on Friday, while Anooraq Resources reported the death of an employee at the Bokoni platinum mine's Middelpunt Hill UG2 shaft on the same day.

Implats said a full investigation was under way and that it had suspended operations at Impala Rustenburg to undertake a safety review.

Meanwhile, Anooraq, which is listed in South Africa and Canada, reported the fatality occurred after the employee was struck by a dump truck in the main decline shaft.

Operations at Bokoni, located on the north-eastern limb of the Bushveld Complex, were voluntarily stopped on Saturday. A preliminary investigation into the accident has been conducted in cooperation with the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) and union

representatives, after which the DMR issued a Section 54 safety stoppage notice in respect of the Middelpunt Hill operations.

"All other mine operations remained unaffected," the company said in a statement.

Before this fatal accident, Bokoni platinum mines had achieved 1.5-million fatality-free shifts on October 15.

Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu last week said the DMR would step up its health and safety audits over the festive season and into the first quarter of 2012. She said recent audits highlighted a culture on noncompliance and warned companies that the department would take action against mines that did not comply with minimum safety standards.

The Minister added that the DMR was reviewing the Mine Health and Safety Act to strengthen enforcement.

Tuesday 22 November 2011

China: Searching for 8 missing coal miners stopped

Extract from ChinaDaily.com.cn

KUNMING - Rescuers decided to stop the search for eight miners Sunday who have been trapped underground for 10 days in a coal pit after a gas leak accident in Southwest China's Yunnan province, saying they had no chance of survival.

The accident occurred at the Sizhuang Coal Mine in Shizong county of Qujing city on the morning of Nov 10, when a powerful gas outburst hit an underground platform and then another. A total of 43 miners were trapped and 35 bodies have so far been retrieved.

Although rescuers had confirmed the location of the other eight miners, the "dangerous" underground situation forced them to stop the rescue work, said Li Jianjun, secretary-general of the Qujing municipal government.

A high density of gas, poor visibility, narrow space and potential dangers of coal-dust explosion and detonator explosion in that work platform threaten the safety of rescuers, Li said.

"Experts believe the eight trapped miners have no chance of survival under such circumstances after more than 240 hours. So we decide to give up the search," he said.

Hundreds of rescuers had been mobilized to join in the rescue operation over the past days.

Local procurators had earlier said initial investigation found four officials in charge of coal mine safety were to blame for dereliction of duty. The four, including Sun Zhongqiao, vice head of the coal industry administrative bureau of Shizong, have been detained and further investigation is underway.

The mine was operating illegally, having had its license revoked a year ago, according to a statement from the provincial coal safety supervision bureau. The bureau ordered the mine to stop production in April.

Four bosses of the mine had been detained at the time for lax mining safety.

Wednesday 23 November 2011

Expert warned of Pike River mine 'explosion' - inquiry

Extract from tvnz.co.nz

A Japanese mining expert says he warned that no-one should go underground at the Pike River mine until two issues were resolved.

Masaoki Nishioka was giving evidence again today at the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the explosions in the West Coast mine last November that killed 29 men.

With 40 years' international experience, Masaoki Nishioka is an expert in hydro mining in which a jet of high-pressure water is used to break up the coal face.

This is a complex process, and like all underground mining, is dangerous because methane gas seeps out of the coal.

Nishioka arrived at Pike River in July 2010. However, he had left by October, a month before the first explosion, due to safety concerns, saying he was "too frightened" to go back underground.

He told the inquiry in Greymouth today of how he expressed to management that an accident was imminent.

"This mine could explode... I couldn't guarantee it would explode or not but the situation was as bad as what I said," Nishioka said.

He said he had told management that no-one should go underground until two issues were resolved.

Nishioka said those two issues were to do with the setting up of vent and methane bleeding.

He said he recalled telling mine manager Doug White and chief executive Peter Whittall in a meeting in Greymouth that he would not be comfortable sending people underground until these systems were in place.



Pike River mine manager Peter Whittall, who is facing charges over last year's mine disaster in New Zealand. Picture: AP Source: AP

However, Nishioka agreed that he continued to go underground and that most of his communication to Pike River management about safety concerns was done verbally.

Safety concerns

It appears that the safety concerns were known to some of Nishioka's colleagues.

Nishioka told the court today he had spoken to several staff about his safety concerns, including Pieter van Rooyen, Terry Moynihan and George Mason.

He said he did not know if the men were frightened but van Rooyen said that it was "very scary", and that he would not go underground.

Nishioka said he warned Mason: "I told him straight, this mine could explode. The situation was as bad as I said."

This came on Nishioka's last day, and he said Mason's response was that he would be careful.

Nishioka also told the inquiry that he had many conversations with Pike River engineer Matt Cole about the problems in the mine.

In an email sent to Cole, Nishioka said "it was very sad what happened, but it was expected as you know, and we have been very afraid".

On the day Nishioka sent a termination-type email which did not mention safety concerns. But he said he had mentioned the problems to Whittall previously.

"I gave him the strong word. I think he already knew the problems. It was not so polite to repeat all the problems in this final saluting letter, so I didn't reiterate the problems."

Mr Nishioka said he did not go to safety manager Neville Rockhouse with his concerns.

The inquiry continues.

"We're not going to put up with it"

Meanwhile, the Pike River families are now hiring their own engineer because they are so frustrated about delays with retrieving the 29 men's bodies.

"The project engineer will talk about what's doable, time-wise and chances of what's happening," family lawyer Nicholas Davidson said.

Plans to seal the far end of the tunnel are behind schedule, with families hoping rescue teams

would be well inside the tunnel before Christmas, but that is now looking unlikely.

"That mine's been safe for six months. We've had a lot of people wanting to go in the mine (then) set back after set back. We're not going to put up with it. This is us challenging the system," said family spokesperson Bernie Monk.

The families are worried that once the mine is sold there will be little incentive to go further in to recover the bodies.

This week in mining accident history

24 November 1999

Northparkes Mine

Parkes, NSW, Australia

Underground metal mine

4 killed, airblast

Source: World Socialist Web Site, wsws.org

The accident that claimed the lives of four mine workers on November 24 at the Northparkes copper and gold mine near Parkes, in central west New South Wales, again focuses attention on the issue of safety standards in the mining industry.

The four men, Ross Bodkin 41, Michael House 33, Stuart Osmond 47 and Colin Lloyd-Jones 41, were killed instantly when millions of tonnes of ore and earth collapsed suddenly causing a catastrophic air blast through an access tunnel in which they were working 140 metres below ground.

The collapse extended hundreds of metres right up to ground level. The resulting wind blast was so powerful that it ripped apart the two-tonne Toyota Land Cruiser carrying two of the men and spread shattered metal and wreckage over a kilometre along the mine shaft. The police believe that the injuries will be so severe that they will have to rely on dental charts and other personal data to confirm the identity of the dead. The initial identification was made on the basis of the four work tags that remained on the board after other workers were brought to the surface.

One of the mine's engineers said: "Normally not much ore falls down. This time it appears a huge amount fell. There would have been a massive blast of air and even if the miners had been some distance away, there would have been nowhere for the air to escape. It was like being trapped in a piston."



[Loaders underground at the Northparkes Mine](#)

The incident could easily have resulted in a greater loss of life. Another 57 men were carrying out maintenance work on mining and crushing equipment in the control room some 300 metres below the access shaft. The blast caused the ground to shake around them. They were forced to remain underground for over three hours while rescue teams sought to determine whether it was safe for them to exit.

Malcolm Bloomfield, the managing director of North Limited, the mine's owner, stated that the deaths had been caused by an "irregularity" in the mining method currently in use at the mine. Northparkes is the only underground mine in Australia using a method of ore extraction known as block caving.

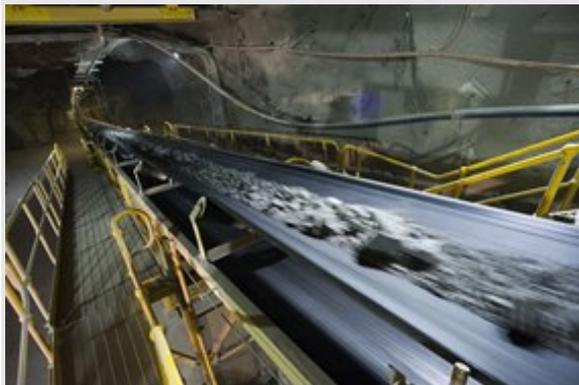
The technique consists of creating a void in the ground under a core of ore. Miners precipitate a movement in the ore body through gypsum cracks producing what is known as a "controlled collapse". The conglomerate above then falls into the void where the ore is recovered through points at the base that are serviced by protected access tunnels.

When a "controlled collapse" is in progress there is normally a crew of about six men and the

process is done largely by remote control. The team is located in the protected control room.

A company spokesman confirmed that the accident took place during a maintenance shutdown and that there was no mining taking place at the time. He said that the company had no explanation for the unexpected collapse, saying, "on this occasion the body of ore decided to move itself". He claimed that there had been no prior indications. The matter is now the subject of several investigations.

The inability of the company to explain why an unscheduled collapse occurred and why it had taken them by surprise puts a question mark over the whole procedure. It also challenges the management's claims that block caving is a safer method of mining than most because only a small number of people are underground when the mining is in progress.



An underground conveyor belt at the Northparkes Mine.

The central attraction of block mining is not its safety features. Northparkes management admits that it adopted the method because it is a cheap means of extracting large quantities of the low-grade ore. When the mine first opened the management claimed that the operation had the potential for becoming the "lowest cost underground hard rock operation" in the country.

This prediction has been borne out. In the first six months of operations this year, the mine has already exceeded its projected full year's profit. While the mine only employs 200 men, its ore mining and processing capacity stands at five million tonnes per annum.

Any mining method involving "controlled" collapses contains inherent dangers and as the incident at Northparkes demonstrates it can produce unpredictable results.

Although not the same as block caving, controlled collapses in the coal mining industry have already resulted in incidents that could have ended in the loss of life. One such method, in which a mechanical miner moves forward allowing the roof to collapse behind it, is currently in use at the underground Moonee Colliery at Catherine Hill Bay, just south of Newcastle.

In early 1998, 19 miners were injured in an air blast at Moonee when the roof was allowed to collapse. In April the following year, another miner Steven Chandler suffered serious injuries when a collapsing roof caused a massive blast of air to surge through the shaft where he was working. The mine's manager Ross Campbell defended the company's decision to continue with the method because "it made the operation viable," that is profitable.

Despite numerous official inquiries into the safety conditions in NSW mines and a mountain of recommendations, the death toll continues to mount. Last week's tragedy at Northparkes brings the total number of fatalities in NSW mines since March 1995 to 28—an average of seven deaths every year. Northparkes is the most serious accident since four miners were killed in the Gretley Colliery, near Newcastle in November 1996.

Only last year the Labor government claimed to have implemented most of the 44 recommendations handed down from the inquiry into mine safety initiated in 1996 to quell growing anger in mining communities. The recently completed judicial inquiry into the Gretley deaths produced another 43 recommendations and last month the government announced it was now planning prosecutions.

But the official inquiries will not bring about a progressive change in the grave situation facing

miners because they are designed to mystify the underlying causes that have produced it. Over the past years, driven by increasingly ruthless international competition, the mining companies have demanded the removal of any impediment to increased productivity. In the resulting “hot house” atmosphere in the mines, greater production has increasingly taken precedence over safety.

Despite the evidence to the contrary, the mining unions have hailed the outcome of each inquiry as a step towards greater safety in the mines. The unions are deeply implicated as they have collaborated for over a decade in the drive for “international competitiveness”. The destruction of thousands of jobs, the reduction of manning levels, and longer working hours and shifts have all contributed to the undermining of safety standards.



Northparkes Airblast Losses Remembered, 24 November 2009

Northparkes remembers 10th anniversary of air blast - 27 Nov, 2009

More than 200 people attended a special private memorial service at Northparkes Mines on Tuesday – the 10th anniversary of the tragic accident which claimed four lives.

Northparkes invited the families, friends, past and current colleagues of the four men who were fatally injured in an air blast on 24 November 1999 – Ross Bodkin, Michael House, Colin Lloyd-Jones and Stuart Osman – for a

service to acknowledge and reflect on the tragedy.

Friday 25 November 2011

NZ: Pike River boss under-manager during fatal mine blasts in Aust

Extract from nzherald.com.nz

Pike River Coal's former hydro mining co-ordinator was previously the under-manager at two Australian mines that exploded, killing 23 men.

George Mason worked at Moura No 4 Mine in 1986, where an explosion killed 12 men. In 1994, he was at Moura No 2 Mine which exploded, killing 11.

According to his written evidence to the royal commission of inquiry yesterday, he surrendered his certificate of competency a year later.

In 2007, he re-entered the industry as a miner after stints as a fisherman and in an aluminium refinery.

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union lawyer Nigel Hampton, QC, said Mr Mason did not have his New Zealand competency certificates, although some of the Pike River miners thought he did.

Mr Mason had started at Pike River months before the fatal explosion a year ago. He had not relayed an international expert's concerns about ventilation to managers. Criticism after the 1994 Moura blast related to failures to communicate with management, Mr Hampton said.

Mr Mason, who still works for Pike River Coal (in receivership) as the mining co-ordinator, had told former mine manager Peter Whittall during a phone interview for the job that he had no experience in hydro mining but was confident he could upskill.

Once at Pike River, he'd received no formal training, learning on the job. He'd tried to

research it on the internet but couldn't find much, and management had supplied no documents.

Hydro mining was "all very high-tech" and he'd initially felt over-whelmed, although he'd had no qualms about managing the process later.

About half the crews operating the hydro machine had no formal training but three of the men who died in the explosion - Peter O'Neill, Keith Valli and Allan Dixon - were experienced in it.

Mr Mason had thought staff should be familiar with operations underground before starting hydro training. He was concerned at the number of inexperienced staff.

"[But] they were all placed there with deputies and experienced people around them."

Mr Mason's lack of experience in hydraulic mining was highlighted by a Solid Energy team that toured the Pike River mine on November 3.

Their notes said: "George Mason appeared out of his depth".

He was asked to accompany the team by his supervisor in the hope he would learn from them.

Mr Mason acknowledged the Solid Energy team had more knowledge of hydraulic mining.

However, he said he had a long history of experience in coal mining and knew about extraction.

Mr Mason revealed that in the early hours of October 30, three weeks before the disaster, there was a significant rockfall in front of the hydro machine. The steel mesh bent down a few metres in front and rubble fell on the machine.

In early November, struggling to mine the coal, the company moved to shot-firing to loosen up the coal because the men thought it too hard.

"That was carried out without my prior knowledge," he said.

Mr Mason confirmed international expert Masaoki Nishioka relayed concerns about the lack of ventilation.

Mr Mason had found him hard to understand, and he didn't tell management "because I understood the situation was being addressed".

All haste was being made to get hydro mining started and the main fan commissioned.

Mr Mason couldn't access methane readings through the computer system.

Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing union counsel Nigel Hampton also questioned Mr Mason's ability to get methane readings from the Pike River mine.

He did not print out graphs showing methane records as he had difficulty with the computer process.

"I was aware of what was happening in the mine without referring to a graph," Mr Mason said.

Asked why he didn't raise that with management, he said: "Pass".

Earlier, Minserv mining consultant David Stewart, who performed a series of audits on the Pike River between February and April last year, said Mr Mason had not received enough training for supervising hydraulic mining.

"It's inadequate training and experience to take on a role such as that.

"I would not be recommending such a person."

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BARREN

Said of rock or vein material containing no minerals of value, and of strata without coal, or containing coal in seams too thin to be workable.

-Ed