



Mining Accident News No.1134

2 to 12 December 2011

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Friday 2 December 2011

Qld: Miner sues after losing leg

Extract from The Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, Qld, Aus

A CAPRICORN Coast miner is suing for more than \$2m after doctors were forced to amputate his lower right leg following a horror mining incident.

A claim lodged this week with the Supreme Court at Rockhampton says a fellow miner drove over the man's foot with an EIMCO (heavy piece of mining machinery) while working underground at Caledon Coal's Cook Colliery, Blackwater.

The injuries, which include severe phantom pains in his right lower limb, have had a major impact on his life, curtailing what he can do and restricting future earning capacity.

The claim says the injured man, who The Bulletin hasn't identified due to the nature of some of the injuries he suffered, was employed as a mine driver when the incident happened about 9.40am on May 3, 2008.

He has taken legal action against the mine's owners, Caledon Resources, the man who ran over his foot and the contract company this person worked for, DJT Enterprises, as well as the company which provided the on-site supervisor, Inseam Mining.

The Bulletin was unable to contact any of these parties yesterday.

Breaches of alleged negligence, detailed in the claim, include:

The mine operator for allegedly failing to provide adequate training on how to move safely within the accident site and how the EIMCO was to be safely moved;

The machine's driver who it's claimed acted recklessly in reversing the EIMCO in circumstances where he was unable to see behind the machine. He also did not provide a warning and travelled at an excessive speed for the circumstances; and

The company who employed the supervisor who allegedly failed to carry out a risk-assessment of the site, including the depressions in the ground surface and slope of the ground.

The claim says the accident site was dark and the machinery was not fitted with any reverse or change of direction alarm

The claim includes nearly \$1m in lost future earnings, \$150,000 for pain, suffering and loss of amenities of life and more than \$200,000 for future domestic care.

Caledon bought the Cook coal mine from Xstrata in 2006.

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 34 of 2011

USA: Parker Peerless mine put on notice

Extract from The register-Herald, USA

A Raleigh County coal mine and three other operations in West Virginia have been put on notice that they are in danger of being cited for a potential pattern of violations, and if corrections are not made, the federal government could close them.

One is the Parker Peerless mine of Marfork Coal Co. Inc., located near Sundial along W.Va. 3, within five miles of the ill-fated Upper Big Branch, scene of the deadliest mining accident in four decades.

An underground explosion shook the UBB two years ago, leaving 29 workers dead. A final report on the cause of that is expected to be released by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration next week in Beckley.

Joseph Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health, said his agency briefed companies in April about an online tool allowing them to regularly monitor compliance and injury records under the PPOV initial screening criteria and to improve health and safety in accordance.

"Unfortunately, some operators either did not use this tool or did not respond with effective improvements," Main said.

Mines that display a pattern of violations of "significant and substantial" violations, known as S&S, that could lead to a serious injury or illness, can expect "enhanced enforcement," MSHA said in a statement.

MSHA said is obligated by its regulations to screen for such violations at least once annually.

The other West Virginia mines identified were Pay Car Mining Inc.'s No. 58 mine in McDowell, Rio Group Inc.'s No. 2 mine in Logan County, and Pine Ridge Coal Co.'s Big Mountain No. 16 in Boone County.

Mine operations failing to reduce S&S violations are subject to a notice for a pattern of violations and closure orders. If the improvement doesn't

meet MSHA's standards, the agency can issue an order to withdraw miners from the affected areas of an installation until the problems have been cleared.

Without identifying any, MSHA said other mines besides the eight cited in its announcement remain under investigation.

Sunday 4 December 2011

USA: Hecla Responds to MSHA's Accident Report

Extract from The Wall Street Journal

PRESS RELEASE

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho, -- Hecla Mining Company ("Hecla") received the Report of Investigation ("Report") from the United States Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") relating to the April 15, 2011 fatal accident at the Lucky Friday mine in Mullan, Idaho.

Prior to the fall of ground in April, Hecla's safety record at the Lucky Friday mine was excellent. Hecla employees, past and present, worked for more than 25 years, and 8.5 million man-hours without a fatality. During that same time period, the Company continued to make strides in accident reduction.

"Our Company works hard each day to have our miners return home safely to their families at the end of their shift. This has been a gut-wrenching time for our Company and for our communities," said Phil Baker, President and Chief Executive Officer. "In my opinion and upon examination, the Report does not substantiate MSHA's previously issued citations."

Hecla has already worked with MSHA to address issues outlined in the Report which resulted in the re-opening of the mine and continued operations. However, Hecla is contesting the citations referenced in the Report. For example, contrary to MSHA's claims, the work was being conducted in accordance with Hecla's ground control plan. Hecla understands

MSHA is planning on posting the Report on its website in the near future.

"While we are back at work, the memories of our fallen miners remain with us, and as such, this can never be business as usual," Baker said.

ABOUT HECLA

Established in 1891, Hecla Mining Company is the largest and lowest cash cost silver producer in the U.S. The company has two operating mines and exploration properties in four world-class silver mining districts in the U.S. and Mexico.

Monday 5 December 2011

NZ: Pike River safety case postponed

Extract from stuff.co.nz

Court action against three parties charged with alleged health and safety failures at Pike River coalmine over the deaths of 29 men has been adjourned until the end of next month.

Last month, the Labour Department laid 25 charges against Pike River Coal, Pike's newly-redundant chief executive, Peter Whittall, and contractor Valley Longwall International's in-seam drilling subsidiary, VLI Drilling.

They were due to appear in Greymouth District Court tomorrow to face the charges for the first time but the hearing was adjourned until January 31, the court confirmed today.

The Royal Commission into last November's fatal blast resumed today at the court, the third week of phase three hearings into what happened at the mine and why.

One of the main focuses for the next two weeks of hearings was to examine Pike River Coal directors' roles plus the company's structure and decision-making.

It would also delve Pike's risk management plus whether it complied with mining laws and recognised practices.

While former Pike chairman John Dow would give evidence at the inquiry later this week, Pike's former chief executive, Gordon Ward, had refused to return to New Zealand to be a witness.

A commission spokesperson confirmed Ward had been asked to give evidence at the December hearings but he declined.

He had also refused to supply any evidence to any phase of the inquiry, including written statements.

"We can't compel him to give evidence as compulsion orders don't apply overseas and he is in Australia now," the spokesperson said.

Ward was the mine's chief executive from May 2007 until seven weeks before the mine exploded.

When his resignation was announced in September last year, Pike's board thanked Ward for his "significant contribution to the company over what has been an extended and often difficult period of mine development".

He had moved to Australia to work as chief operating officer for Queensland Coal Corporation.

Spokesman for some Pike families, Bernie Monk, said Ward had an ethical responsibility to return to New Zealand to answer questions about what happened at the mine.

However, he said Ward could still face police prosecution, regardless of whether he returned to give evidence at the inquiry.

Pike River: 'Lip service' on safety

Extract from stuff.co.nz

Failures by Pike River Coal management to enforce safety and slow handling of incidents made miners perceive a "low level of commitment to safety", the inquiry into last November's fatal blast has heard this morning.

The Royal Commission into the Pike tragedy has resumed this morning in Greymouth District

Court with the underground West Coast coalmine's former safety and training coordinator, Adrian Couchman, the first of four witnesses due to take the stand over the next two weeks.

Initially, former chairman John Dow was due to give evidence first but the witness order had a late change due to their availability.

Couchman, who said he had no mining experience prior to starting at Pike River in September 2008, raised concerns today about tardy action by managers over reported hazards and incidents.



DEIDRE MUSSEN/Fairfax NZ
Pike River's former safety and training co-ordinator, Adrian Couchman.

"There was a lot of lip service from managers and supervisors in support of the reporting system, however the reporting system was not fully supported by some individual managers," he said in his written evidence.

"This was not overt refusal on their part, they just avoided doing it."

The engineering department was a prime example, which had 200 outstanding incident or accident inquiries at one stage with some lodged more than a year earlier, Couchman said.

Other problems included limited induction and safety training for contractors prior to going underground, which was less than offered to mining staff.

"I do not believe that their safety standards were as high as Pike River staff because most of the contractors had no depth of experience in the coal mining industry and were not always fully aware of the consequences of their actions," he said.

As a result, he proposed more in-depth induction for contractors to then-mine manager Doug White and then-safety and training manager Neville Rockhouse.

However, he was told it was a good idea but would have to wait until the mine was in full production, which had not been due until February 2011, three months after the first fatal explosion that killed 29 men.

Couchman's role changed in September 2010, which saw him removed from his safety role and focused solely on training.

He disagreed with the change and believed it reduced the safety presence in the mine.

Experienced staff shortages meant Pike was unable to meet its requirement of having four deputies and one underviewer underground per shift. It should have employed a total of 16 deputies because the mine had four shifts, he said.

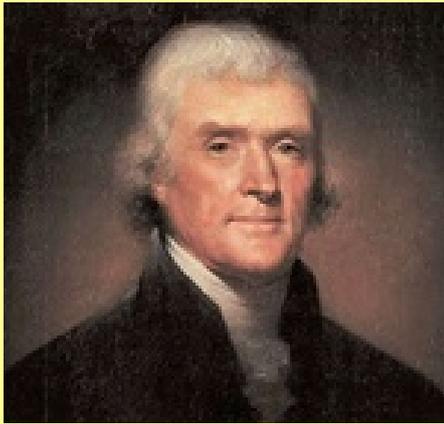
Health and safety refresher courses were introduced about June or July last year but it was cancelled because participation dropped off.

The reason was staff were needed to continue production and were unable to be released for training, Couchman said.

He was expected to finish giving evidence today, his second time to appear at the inquiry, and would be followed by mine contractor McConnell Dowell's former leading hand, Albert Houlden.

Dow would be third to take the stand, and Rockhouse would be the final witness for this months' two weeks of phase three hearings, which would probe what happened at Pike River and why.

Quote of the week



"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."

Thomas Jefferson
3rd President of the United States (1743-1826)

Tuesday 6 December 2011

Pike River: 'That mine's going to go'

Extract from stuff.co.nz

An experienced English coalminer stopped working at Pike River because he feared the mine was going to explode.

"I just didn't feel safe," contractor McConnell Dowell's former leading hand, Albert Houlden, today told the Royal Commission into last November's fatal blast that killed 29 men.

He said he was concerned with Pike's inexperienced staff and highlighted various incidents with ventilation problems.

"Many times I'd come out and I'd have a splitting headache and feel real sick because of the CO (carbon monoxide) from the machines, because again there had been a problem with the ventilation."

Houlden began mining in the United Kingdom as a 16-year-old and had 37 years mining experience with about 20 years coalmining experience around the world.



ALBERT HOULDEN: "I just didn't feel safe."

He was brought to New Zealand by Solid Energy in 2007 and worked at Spring Creek for two and a half years before moving to Pike in October 2009 to work for McConnell Dowell.

He resigned and shifted to Papua New Guinea after about nine months at the underground West Coast mine.

"There was one day when I came home and said to my wife 'I'm taking that job I've been offered for because that mine (Pike) is going to go'."

Houlden returned to New Zealand just before Pike exploded and could have returned to work there but decided to work for Solid Energy after his wife warned him not to go back to Pike.

The ratio of inexperienced to experienced miners was much higher in the United Kingdom than at Pike, he said.

"Many of the miners were classed as experienced when they had only been mining for a very short time.

"My biggest concern when I was there was the young men who honestly thought they were miners but didn't appreciate where they were working. With the amount of gas at Pike, you had to be more than careful and manage it in a proper and safe manner. They didn't think it was a big issue shutting our ventilation down so they got more somewhere else. You can't do that and

they needed to be made aware what the implications were when they did do these kinds of things."

He said training given to contractors at Pike was insufficient for inexperienced staff.

"Contractors who had little or no experience of working underground were working in the mine with very little induction training and were hardly supervised."

However, he had no concerns about McConnell Dowell staff's experience and agreed he enjoyed working for the contractor but "hated working for Pike".

He said he could not understand why Pike did not have a ventilation officer.

Houlden has finished his evidence this morning at Greymouth District Court and Pike River Coal former chairman John Dow has taken the stand.



ON THE STAND: Pike River Coal former chairman John Dow.

USA: Investigation opened for mine accident

Extract from Zanesville Times Recorder, USA

PERRY COUNTY -- The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration is investigating a report of a wall collapse at an Oxford Mining operation in Perry County, just outside of New Lexington near Rehoboth.

Spokesperson Scott Allen said the agency was notified of an incident that occurred Saturday where one worker was injured. No other details were available.

Company spokesperson Mike Gardner said the Saturday morning incident involved a 20-year employee who was operating a bulldozer when the accident occurred. New Lexington rescue squad came to the scene, and the man was later flown to Grant Medical Center in Columbus with serious injuries.

Investigators were at the scene Saturday and again on Monday, Gardner said.

Two Chilean Miners Die in Explosion

Extract from Prensa Latina, Latinoamericana

Santiago, Chile - Two Chilean workers died in an explosion in a copper mine in the north on Monday.

The victims were identified as Fernando Iturra and Jose Henriquez, aged 26 and 21, respectively.



According to reports from the area of the accident in Chañaral community, in Atacama region, the miners could not leave the tunnel after planting the explosives.

The National Geology and Mining Service reported 45 workers killed in the mining sector at the end of 2010, due to collapses, explosions or accidents. The Atacama region has reported the highest rate of mining accidents with 28.9 percent of the total.

The lack of safety in Chilean mines came to light on August 5, 2010, when 33 workers were trapped for 70 days in a mine in the Atacama Desert following a collapse.

USA: Feds unveil record settlement in W.Va. mine blast

Extract from Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The owner of a West Virginia mine where 29 men died in the deadliest U.S. coalfield accident in decades will pay \$210 million, the largest settlement ever in a federal investigation of a mine disaster, prosecutors said Tuesday.

U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin said the deal would compensate victims' families, pay fines and improve underground safety. It also does not prevent the future prosecutions of individuals on criminal charges in the April 2010 blast.

The agreement between federal authorities and the new owners of the Upper Big Branch mine includes \$46.5 million in criminal restitution to the miners' families, \$128 million to fund cutting-edge mine safety upgrades, research and training, and \$35 million in penalties for federal mine safety violations, Goodwin said.

Goodwin characterized the settlement as a "non prosecution agreement," and said Alpha Natural Resources — which acquired the mine's owner, Massey Energy, this year — will not be charged with crimes as long as they abide by its terms. He also stressed that the agreement does not bar any future prosecutions of individuals as both his office's probe and one Alpha is conducting internally continue.

"No individuals are off the hook," Goodwin said.

Goodwin called Tuesday's agreement the largest resolution of a criminal investigation into a U.S. mine disaster, and one of the biggest settlements arising from a workplace safety crime.

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, meanwhile, expected to brief the victims' families and then the media Tuesday on its final report

from the disaster. Federal investigators have previously blamed the Raleigh County blast on a combination of methane gas, coal dust and broken or malfunctioning equipment in the underground mine.

Massey Energy Co. operated Upper Big Branch through a subsidiary at the time of the explosion. The Virginia-based Massey has since been acquired by rival Alpha, which reached the sweeping agreement with federal officials.

Alpha has agreed to pay \$35 million for all citations against Massey's former mines, including \$10.8 million in violations that MSHA will announce in Tuesday's investigative report.

The \$46.5 million in criminal restitution aims to guarantee that the families of the 29 miners and two co-workers who survived the explosion each receive \$1.5 million. Eighteen families of deceased miners have filed wrongful death lawsuits, and eight of those already have settled with Massey. Another nine employees filed lawsuits, claiming emotional distress because of the explosion.

For the families, the deal is about half of what Massey initially offered. Within a month of the blast, the daughter of one dead miner told The Associated Press that Massey was offering \$3 million to each of the families. Michelle McKinney, daughter of Benny Ray Willingham, said the offers came in personal visits, but she wasn't interested in settling because her father's life had no price tag.

McKinney didn't immediately respond to messages Tuesday.

Before she went into a briefing on the settlement Tuesday morning, one victim's mother was furious about word that a deal had been struck.

"I have no intentions of settling with these people that have killed my son," said Patty Quarles, whose son Gary Wayne was among the victims. "They need to be put in jail."

The Virginia-based Alpha will also invest \$48 million in a mine, health and safety research trust, and another \$80 million to improve safety

at all of its underground mines with the latest technology and equipment. The upgrades include sufficient workers and gear to coat mines with crushed limestone to dilute the explosive coal dust that accumulates during mining.

The cutting-edge upgrades include digital sensors that continuously monitor air flow and methane gas levels; foam based rock-dusting gear, which is pending MSHA approval, that allows miners to tamp down coal dust levels around the clock; meters that measure coal dust levels; and an oxygen supply system similar to what firefighters rely on, to allow miners to avoid changing air masks while escaping from an underground accident.

"This in several ways is a revolutionary resolution," Goodwin said. "We wanted it to be something constructive and forward-looking."

These investments will also fund a state-of-the-art training center in southern West Virginia that will host a laboratory capable of testing safety conditions in ways that would be too dangerous to attempt in actual mines.

Alpha has also agreed to audit all of its underground mines, correct any shortcomings found within 90 days and report those results to federal officials. The company must similarly share the findings of its internal investigation into the disaster.

The agreement appears to be among the largest resulting from a U.S. mining disaster. The settlement is sizable by Massey standards. In 2009, Massey and subsidiary Aracoma Coal Co. agreed to pay \$4.2 million in criminal fines and civil penalties related to a January 2006 fire that killed two miners at the Alma No. 1 mine.

Don Bragg and Ellery Elvis Hatfield died after getting lost as they tried to flee the sprawling underground Logan County mine. Their widows had settled a wrongful death lawsuit for undisclosed terms in 2008. Four mine supervisors later pleaded guilty to federal misdemeanor charges that they failed to lead

crews on required escape drills at various times in 2005 and 2006.

Gary Quarles, Gary Wayne's father, said he also was hoping for criminal indictments.

"Somebody's got to pay for what's been done," he told The Associated Press late Monday.

Quarles, a miner for nearly 40 years and a former Massey employee, had been inside Upper Big Branch and knew that his son faced bad conditions every day he went to work. But in the eight months since the blast, previous MSHA briefings and comprehensive reports by independent investigators and the United Mine Workers of America have revealed "it was worse than what we thought — a lot worse," he said.

The United Mine Workers of America, the nation's largest coal miners' union, said last month that conditions were so dangerous that Massey executives and managers should be prosecuted for "industrial homicide."

MSHA's final report is likely to include a list of specific violations that contributed, but the agency also refused to comment on the report before its official release. Nor would officials there answer questions about the settlement.

Alpha, which bought Massey and Upper Big Branch in June, has said it's still reviewing the explosion but hasn't indicated whether or when it might issue a report. The state mine safety office, meanwhile, expects to complete its report by the end of January.

But all the reports so far agree on the mechanics of what happened: 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.

All three also say the explosion could have been prevented or contained. Had the mine been

sufficiently dusted with pulverized limestone to render the coal dust inert, the spark wouldn't have had the fuel to propagate.

Experts: Fatality Report Points Finger at Mine

Extract from KUOW.ORG, 94.9FM, USA

SPOKANE, Wash. - A new report on a fatal mine accident in north Idaho lays responsibility for the tragedy on the owners of the mine. But the company has described a very different interpretation of that report from federal investigators.

What we're talking about is a rock collapse 6,000 feet underground. It killed 53-year-old Larry Marek last April 15th at the Lucky Friday Mine in the Idaho panhandle. The silver mine is owned by Hecla Mining of Coeur d'Alene.

Last Friday, the company's president Phil Baker held a press conference in Spokane to release a long-awaited report from the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration. Baker told reporters he had come to this overriding conclusion:

"When I read the report, I don't see anything that would suggest that Hecla has operated in anything less than a prudent manner," he said. "And I think when you read the report, I think you'll come to the same conclusion."

Here's what the report says: It concludes "the accident occurred because management did not have policies and procedures that provided for the safe mining." Further, "management failed to design, install and maintain a support system" to control the rock Marek was under.

Additionally, the report says, "management failed to ensure that appropriate" personnel tested the ground conditions.

Based on those conclusions, mining experts I spoke to say Hecla did not act, as Baker put it, in a "prudent manner."

Bob Ferriter teaches mine safety at the Colorado School of Mines and used to work at the federal mine agency known as MSHA.

"The conclusion says 'failed to ensure that appropriate supervisors and other designated persons examine or tested the ground conditions where the fall occurred.' So, somebody was not checking on what was going on there," Ferriter says.

Ferriter says there's another important matter in the federal report -- a citation inspectors issued to Hecla. It says that mine managers allowed Marek to work under rock that wasn't adequately supported by wood beams.

"You see that next sentence says 'this is an unwarrantable failure.' And in MSHA's language, what "unwarrantable" means, it means that you either should have known or you did know that your actions were dangerous."

Ferriter says it's possible the citations could even lead to criminal prosecution. Other experts I talked to doubted whether there would be criminal charges.

Either way, Hecla says it plans to challenge the citations, which altogether could reach \$1 million in fines.

Hecla president Phil Baker said in response to those citations, the company developed a new plan. It keeps mining tunnels narrow and prohibits mining in the method investigators say led to Marek's death.

The federal report also says another factor in the collapse was fractures in the unsupported rock. Hecla's Phil Baker says his company couldn't have known ahead of time that the rock was unstable.

"The way this was designed, you would have expected it to stay in place. No one is absolutely sure what happened," he says. "In MSHA's report, they give some indications of what they think might have happened -- that there were microfractures that we were not aware of."

Tom Brady says Hecla managers should have known about those microfractures. He's a former mine engineer with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

"Yeah, they should know how that rock breaks up, he says. "Does it have unconformities? They usually map all those, the geologist does."

Brady has visited the Lucky Friday mine and says Hecla used to be well-known in the industry for a its safety record.

But, he says, "I just don't know what Hecla's doing now days."

Hecla mining president Phil Baker said the company remains committed to safety. This year marked the first fatality at the mine since 1986.

"Eight million man hours passed before we had this fatality in April. It is something that devastates our company, devastates the communities we're in."

Baker said it was all the more devastating when another miner died at the Lucky Friday in November. It was unrelated the rock fall last April. Brandon Gray was working on a project that will deepen the mine to nearly 9,000 feet, and increase silver production by 60 percent.

On the Web:

Larry Marek MSHA fatalgram:

<http://www.msha.gov/fatals/2011/FAB11m04.asp>

Lucky Friday Mine:

http://www.hecla-mining.com/operations/operations_luckyfriday.php

Is Massey Boss Mining Coal Again?

Extract from ABC News, USA

Is the notorious West Virginia coal boss Don Blankenship back in business?

There are new indications that Blankenship may be attempting a return to the industry that helped him build a massive personal fortune, but also tarnished his image as the man at the helm during the deadliest American mining disaster in decades. Twenty-nine men were killed in the April 2010 explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine. On Tuesday, the company that bought Massey agreed to pay a record \$210

million fine to resolve the government's case against the firm. But what has become of Blankenship?

Kentucky state incorporation records show that scarcely a month after Blankenship agreed to step down as CEO of Massey Energy, he signed papers identifying him as the president of a newly-named company, McCoy Coal Group Inc. McCoy is the family name of Blankenship's mother.

The status of McCoy Coal and Blankenship's role with the firm remain unclear -- calls to the company's lawyer and to Blankenship's attorney have not been returned.

Blankenship accepted a \$12 million golden parachute from Massey in December 2010. Upon his departure, he was eligible to receive an additional \$5,000-per-month to serve as a Massey consultant for two years, paid health insurance, a secretary, residential property rights and accrued pay from his employment, including performance bonuses. As part of the deal, Blankenship agreed not to compete with Massey for two years and to cooperate with the company as it attempted to resolve litigation that arose during his tenure.

Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) told ABC News Tuesday that he will be appalled if Blankenship is attempting a return to the mining industry.

"I would be stunned to find out that any state issued him a permit to run a coal mine," said Miller. "They're endangering their citizens if they do."

Miller said he thought Blankenship's record would not sit well "with the citizens of any state in terms of how you run a business enterprise, how you take care of your workers, how you take care of the families and the danger of which you place them in on an ongoing basis."

Miller's comments came as the new owner of Massey's coal mines reached the largest settlement ever in response to a U.S. mining disaster. The money will go to compensate

grieving families, bankroll cutting-edge safety improvements and pay for years of violations.

Under the deal, Alpha Natural Resources -- which acquired the mine's owner, Massey Energy, earlier this year — will not be charged with any crimes in the April 2010 blast at the Upper Big Branch mine as long as the company abides by the settlement, U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin said. But the agreement does not prevent individual employees from being prosecuted.

"No individuals are off the hook," Goodwin told the Associated Press, adding that federal prosecutors are still investigating.

Tuesday 7 December 2011

USA: Dems push GOP to bolster mine safety

Extract from The Hill Blog, USA

A damning new mine-safety report is fresh evidence that Congress needs to act to protect the nation's miners, according to several senior House Democrats.

Reps. George Miller (D-Calif.), Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.) and Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.) say the Labor Department's findings that last year's deadly coal mine explosion in West Virginia was preventable are an indication that stricter protections are required to avert the next catastrophe.

The lawmakers are urging Republicans to bolster mine-safety laws even as GOP leaders have scheduled a Wednesday vote on legislation designed to un-tether industry from similar restrictions.

"We still need to pass legislation to shore up the inefficiencies that still exist," Rahall told The Hill. "I just as strongly, if not more so, feel the need for that legislation."

More than 20 months after a blast at the Upper Big Branch mine in southern West Virginia killed 29 miners, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released the results of its

investigation Tuesday, finding that the mine owner, Massey Energy, systematically violated federal safety standards that might have prevented the disaster.

Massey, the investigators wrote, "promoted and enforced a workplace culture that valued production over safety, including practices calculated to allow it to conduct mining operations in violation of the law."

In a separate move, the Department of Justice fined Massey's new owner, Alpha Natural Resources, \$209 million for violations surrounding the disaster.

Republicans in Congress have resisted new mine-safety legislation since the April 2010 explosion, arguing that Congress shouldn't intervene before the cause of the blast was known.

Rahall said the damning nature of Tuesday's MSHA report, combined with similar findings by several other investigative teams, should be plenty to convince even skeptical Republicans that Congress needs tougher laws to ensure miner safety.

"Republicans have been saying we need to wait for the results of the investigations. Well, we have the results of the investigations — three reports now," Rahall said. "I don't know what more they need to wait on."

The Democrats have a tough road ahead, as Republicans in both chambers have been wary of saddling new restrictions on the powerful mining industry, citing the effect the rules could have on jobs. Indeed, the House on Wednesday is poised to pass legislation that would require the White House to get Congress's approval before installing any regulations estimated to cost more than \$100 million — effectively shifting a vast amount of regulatory power from the executive branch to the legislative.

Miller said Wednesday that the MSHA findings are good reason to oppose such a move.

"It was 29 dead coal miners because the Massey corporation was basically allowed to, by

their board of directors, evade the basic regulations that were in place to protect the miners," Miller said on the House floor. "That's what it looks like when you don't have regulations."

Democrats are pushing legislation, sponsored by Miller, to hike penalties for mine operators who violate safety rules, expand whistleblower protections for miners who report hazards and grant subpoena power to federal inspectors conducting investigations into accidents.

The proposal passed out of the Education and Labor Committee last year, when Democrats were in the majority, but was shot down by the full House, which didn't provide the two-thirds majority needed under the suspension of the rules governing the vote. Rep. Walter Jones (N.C.) was the only Republican to support the measure, while 27 Democrats opposed it.

Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), chairman of the Education and Workforce Committee, hammered Massey Tuesday for a "failure to make safety a top priority [that] forced miners to face greater danger in an inherently hazardous profession."

Kline said he'll be holding a hearing on the MSHA findings, though he didn't indicate when.

Meanwhile, Democrats aren't holding their breath for the Republicans to act, with Miller conceding Tuesday that he is "not very optimistic at all" about his bill's chances under a GOP majority.

"This is out of mind until another explosion takes place," he said.

Upper Big Branch Accident Report

<http://www.msha.gov/Fatals/2010/UBB/PerformanceCoalUBB.asp>

Wednesday 8 December 2011

Zambia: Prioritise safety, mines told

Extract from Zambia Daily Mail

DEPUTY Minister of Mines and Natural Resources Richard Musukwa has urged mining companies in the country to prioritise safety in their operations to avoid endangering the lives of workers.

Mr Musukwa said mining companies should put in place mechanisms to promote safety at workplaces to avoid fatal accidents.

He said this in Chililabombwe on Monday when he toured the Konkola Copper Mines (KCM) Integrated Business Unit (IBU) to check on the accident scene, where a foreman electrician, Charles Mwila was burnt and subsequently died.

Mr Mwila, who was assistant coach for KCM-sponsored outfit Konkola Blades, died in South Africa where he was evacuated for specialist treatment after the accident.

"The loss of life is sad. We need to ensure that our miners work in a safe environment to avoid endangering their lives. Issues of safety should be a priority in your lives," Mr Musukwa said.

He urged KCM management to ensure that the contractors it engages adhere to acceptable safety standards.

Mr Musukwa said it is regrettable that 70 percent of the accidents at KCM involve contractors.

He said Government will ensure that mining companies perform to expected standards while protecting the lives of workers through the promotion of safe working conditions.

Mr Musukwa urged KCM to utilise its skilled workforce to maximise production.

"You need to bring everyone on board including the union in improving the operations of the mines. These mines are our assets and we would want them to produce to their full capacity," he said.

Mr Musukwa also visited Mopani Copper Mines (MCM) in Mufulira.

He urged MCM management to work with union officials to improve the operations of the mine.

He said Government wants to improve the mining industry by ensuring that mines improve their production capacities for the benefit of the local people.

Mr Musukwa reaffirmed Government's commitment to supporting the mining industry.

And KCM general manager at the IBU, Rramod Sharma said the mining company has engaged the British Safety Council (BSC) to offer consultancy on safety standards at workplaces.

Mr Sharma said BSC will help KCM management formulate programmes to scale-up safety measures at the mining company.

"We are working hard to promote safety in working places. We have engaged BSC to offer consultancy services to management to help them formulate programmes aimed at scaling up safety measures in work places," he said.

And MCM health safety and environment manager Francis Imasiku said mine accidents have drastically reduced at MCM.

He said 59 accidents were recorded in 2011 from the 72 in 2010.

Mr Imasiku said MCM has put in place measures to promote safety at workplaces.

7 dead in coal mine accident in NE China

Extract from ChinaDaily.com.cn

SHENYANG - Seven people were killed in a coal mining accident on Thursday in Jianchang county in northeast China's Liaoning province, local work safety authorities said.

At about Thursday noon, a roughly four-meter-long section of the mine's roof collapsed and buried seven miners in the privately owned Huatai Coal Mine, said a spokesman with the provincial safety supervision bureau.

The seven were taken to hospital but attempts to save their lives failed. Other miners who were working underground have been lifted out of the accident site with no serious injuries, the spokesman said.

The exact cause of the accident is still under investigation.

The mine's owner and responsible persons have been detained by police.

Friday 9 December 2011

Safety is paramount for miners

Extract from Herald Sun, Aus



*Safety should come before everything else for miners.
Source: The Daily Telegraph*

IF there is one issue that unites the mining industry in a common purpose above all others, it is the safety and health of its employees.

Safety comes before everything. At every mine site - even at the Melbourne offices of our biggest miners - meetings and shifts start with a safety briefing and a discussion of how the job can be done more safely.

At Minerals Council of Australia meetings in Canberra - hundreds of kilometres from the nearest mine - proceedings commence with a safety discussion. Every board meeting includes a detailed presentation on the issue.

The minerals industry has committed itself to the goal of zero fatalities and injuries, and we will never rest in the pursuit and retention of this goal.

The industry considers that all fatalities, injuries and diseases are preventable; that no task is so important that it cannot be done safely; that all

hazards can be identified and their risks managed; and that everyone has a personal responsibility for the safety and health of themselves and their workmates.

There is no question that mining is a hazardous occupation but it does not have to be dangerous.

Regrettably, however, mining industry employees are fatally injured at work - about 11 each year over the past 11 years. In 2008-09, the industry recorded a terrible 18 deaths for the year.

This was and is totally unacceptable.

Every employee has the right to return home safely from work to be with his or her family.

The suggestion made by Alan Howe on this page last Monday that the mining industry is hiding its safety record is nonsense on stilts. It also demonstrated a stunning inability to carry out the most basic of research.

Howe claimed that the industry was indifferent to safety because he couldn't find a reference to the 18 deaths in 2008-09 on the Minerals Council of Australia website.

He didn't look very hard - the figure is in the MCA's 2009 and 2010 annual reports (in several places) and in other submissions to government.

We are not proud of this record - but we are not in the business of trying to cover it up.

The industry wants to learn from every accident - no matter how big or small - to prevent them happening again.

Every company and mining industry body publishes official data reporting on workplace deaths, injuries and safety measures, including the Minerals Council of Australia.

The MCA publishes an array of health and safety data in its annual report, submissions to government, specific reports and in speeches. Our safety record is not a secret.

Outside the MCA, anyone capable of operating Google will be met with screens of information

on mining industry fatalities and injuries for every company operating in Australia.

On the issue of health and safety, the minerals industry is completely transparent.

To suggest, as Howe did, after a cursory glance with half an eye open at cyberspace, that mining doesn't care about safety, was well below the belt.

Regulators, governments and the media are advised at the time of every accidental death at a mine site. The operation is shut down and the accident fully investigated.

Unfortunately, the mining industry's detractors are more interested in scoring cheap points than investigating the facts in an objective manner.

In Howe's case, he chose to turn a blind eye to reality in order to attack the industry. This continues a long-running theme.

When the facts don't fit his preconceptions, he just constructs a line to denigrate an industry that regards the health and safety of its people above all else.

That is truly the ugly face of journalism.

This week in mining accident history

10 December 1909

Caprington Colliery

Kilmarnock, County of Ayr, Scotland, UK

Underground coal mine

10 killed, drowned by inrush of water

Source: www.scotishmining.co.uk

The disaster occurred at 11.45 p.m. on the 10th December at No. 41 pit Caprington Colliery, situated near Kilmarnock, in the County of Ayr, worked by the Caprington and Auchlochan Collieries. It was caused by the roof of an abandoned stoop and room working, near the surface, giving way, with the result that a large body of water, which had during the night overflowed from the River Irvine, or a burn running into it, poured into the old workings, and finding its way to No 41 pit ran down the shaft

forcing accumulated black-damp in front of it, and drowned the 10 persons whose names and occupations are given below :

- David McCabe, 33, miner
- John Balfour, 25, miner
- Henry Graham, 22, miner
- Peter Dorans, 36, waterman
- Hugh Ramsay, junr., 19, waterman
- John Stewart, 17, drawer
- Charles McSherry, 15, drawer
- James Menzies, 15, drawer
- Alexander Clark, junr., 16, drawer
- James Lennon, 17, driver

When the back shift started work at 3.45 p.m. in the afternoon preceding the accident 38 persons descended the pit and three others descended at 10 p.m. By 11.45 25 of the men had left work and gone home, and 16 were below ground at the time of the inrush. Five escaped by way of the up-cast pit known as the new air pit, and another one, James McSherry, was miraculously saved by climbing from the Blind Coal to the Ell Coal bottom, whence he was carried by the flood into the winding shaft, and came out on the top of the cage. The remaining 10 workers were drowned.

The water rose rapidly in the workings to a point in No. 41 shaft 22 feet above the level of the Ell Coal bottom, and within 56 feet of the surface. When it was found there was no hope of escape for those left in the pit, operations were commenced and vigorously continued for the purpose of pumping out the water and recovering the bodies.

On the 21st and 22nd December the bodies of John Stewart, James Lennon, Peter Dorans and John Balfour were found in the Ell Coal within a short distance of No. 41 pit, and the other six bodies were subsequently recovered in the Blind Coal workings, where all the men had been employed.

A public inquiry was held on the 21st February in the Sheriff Court, Kilmarnock, into the circumstances attending the disaster.

After a hearing which lasted all day the verdict of the jury was :-

"That on the 9th or 10th December, 1909, the deceased Peter Dorans, James Lennon, Hugh Ramsay, jr., John Stewart, Alexander Clark, jr., Charles McSherry, David McCabe, James Menzies, Henry Graham, and John Balfour while engaged at their employment in the underground workings of No. 41 pit, Caprington Colliery, Parish of Riccarton, Ayrshire, the property of the Caprington and Auchlochan Coal Company were drowned by an inrush of surface water which flooded said pit."

Description of the colliery

No. 41 pit is one of several pits belonging to the same company which have worked the seams known as the Ell coal, and Blind coal, and is 28 fathoms deep to the lower seam, the Ell coal being 15 fathoms above. It is the winding pit of the colliery, and by it the miners were lowered and raised daily. Twenty yards distant there is an upcast pit known as the "air pit," sunk to the Ell coal, and connected to the Blind coal by a cross-cut mine, and this cross-cut and air shaft formed a second outlet for and ventilated the west section of the workings.

Another shaft known as the "new air pit," 12 yards deep, is connected with the Blind coal workings 330 yards eastward of No. 41. This pit is also an upcast but acts for the east section alone, and five men who escaped by means of this outlet did so by withdrawing the fire or furnace situate about 60 yards from the "new air pit" bottom. The air pits being shallow were not fitted with apparatus for raising or lowering persons, but such apparatus though not in actual use at the time of the accident, was on the works belonging to the mine and available in accordance with section 16 of Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1887.

The certified manager of the pit was Mr. John Gibson, and Mr. Hugh Shaw Dunn was the managing partner of the firm. The Ell coal, 3 feet 6 inches thick, was opened up from No. 41 pit about 15 years ago. The working of it continued

until 1906, when it was abandoned ; the stoops formed by the first working being considered too small to remove without causing subsidence of the surface. The seam was worked by the stoop and room method, and as the workings progressed eastwards, an encroachment from an old colliery was discovered north of the River Irvine; and so from that point onwards the workings really formed an extension of those in existence from adjoining pits 60 years ago. The size of the stoops left varied from 5 to 10 yards square, and the rooms were about 8 feet 6 inches wide. The seam dips slightly northwards, and where the subsidence took place on the night of the disaster the thickness of the cover was about 18 feet.

Present workings

These are in the Blind coal, 3 feet thick, and as previously stated 15 fathoms below the Ell seam. No. 41 pit is a little deeper than the position of the seam, a cross-cut mine rising 1 in 50 intersecting the coal north of the pit. The main levels, east and west, and a dook running northwards, were driven from this point. Stoops were formed from 40 to 80 feet square and afterwards split or reduced as shown on plan. Like the Ell it was also worked on the north side of the River Irvine many years ago, and as these workings were thought to contain accumulated water, a barrier of coal was left between the old and new workings, and boring operations carried on in the latter for fear of encroachment such as had been found to exist in the seam above. No such encroachment however was discovered.

Narrative of the accident

It seems that Thomas Aird, the fireman and charge man of the shift, on the night of the accident was at 11.45 p.m. in the main intake on his way to the pit bottom when he encountered black damp which put out his light. He tried to re-light his lamp, but his matches would not strike. On arriving at the pit bottom, he found the bottomer, David Livingstone, also in the dark. Aird concluded the black damp must be coming from the Ell coal above, and it occurred to him

that by opening an air door and thus short-circuiting the air in that seam the black damp could be diverted to the up-cast pit. Before this could be done he and Livingstone were obliged to go to the surface to get their lamps re-lighted.

On returning down the shaft as far as the Ell coal bottom, Aird succeeded in opening the air door, but through suffering from the effects of black damp returned to the surface. After this Livingstone went back down the pit alone, and after shouting two or three times at the Blind coal bottom, and getting no response, he again ascended the pit. Five minutes afterwards water was heard rushing down the shaft from the Ell coal in such volume as to prevent further access in that direction.

Meantime a miner named James McSherry, 23 years of age, who had at one time acted as a roadsman, succeeded in travelling up the back air-course known as the "chute" to the Ell coal. He met water running down this air-course, but on reaching the junction of two roads he encountered a larger volume, and was carried by it into the winding shaft. After being unable to get further access to the Blind coal by means of No. 41 shaft, a party, headed by the manager, Mr. Gibson, proceeded to the new air pit, and rescued five persons, namely, John Laird, John Laird, jr., Thomas Campbell, John Wilson, and Hugh Gibson.

According to John Laird, Aird the fireman visited their working places in the Blind coal at 9 p.m., and all went right until about midnight. At that hour he and others were on their way out along the east level horse-road when the in-coming air put out their lights. They retired, and meeting Campbell went through an air-door, where they remained a few minutes. On going back into the level their lights went out again, but later they were able to proceed outwards along the east level to a point near the stables (see plan); they there saw John Wilson, and, being unable to encounter the rush of water coining from No. 41 pit, had to turn back, and thereupon he cried to a number of the men to "make for the east." Only four of them, however, did this, and on arriving

at the bottom of the new air pit they thought of raking out the fire of the ventilating cube or furnace to enable them to pass on to the bottom of the pit, but decided first to go back to the water, where they found the boy Hugh Gibson alone, crying, and stating that David McCabe and two boys were drowned. Laird and his son then took Gibson with them back to the "cube." After this they "drew" the fire, which took about 15 minutes, and after waiting for the "sulphur to clear" they were met by the manager and drawn out of the new air pit by a rope. This left 10 men still in the mine, and thereafter the water rose so quickly that it was impossible to rescue them.

I received a telegram on the morning following the disaster, and by 10.40 Mr. Pearson and I got to the colliery. We found from an examination of the working plans and from the level of the water, how hopeless it was to effect the rescue of the entombed men. In fact they must have been beyond help some hours before we reached the pit. We descended the new air shaft by a rope, and found the water had risen up the steep mine or outlet to within 15 feet of the pit bottom ; at the same time the level of the water stood 56 feet from the surface at No. 41 pit and the adjoining air pit, or 22 feet above the Ell coal and higher than any workings to the rise to which the entombed men could get access.

The position of the subsidence of the surface which let the water into the mine is shown on plan. It took place in a field about 500 feet north of Caprington Castle and approximately 135 feet south of the River Irvine, and the opening into the Ell coal seam at a depth of 17 to 18 feet, was 14 feet by 12 feet, and occurred at a point where two rooms or roadways 8 feet 6 inches wide intersected ; but at the surface the gap was considerably larger, caused by the water in its descent washing a large quantity of sand and gravel into the old workings. The force of the deluge into the opening must have been great, for the cavity was littered with trees which had been uprooted in the vicinity of the subsidence, thus rendering the work of inspection difficult.

On the 23rd of December when the water had been pumped low enough and after the bodies of Stewart, Lennon, Balfour and Dorans had been recovered in the Ell coal, Mr. Pearson and I again visited the colliery, and were able to travel between No. 41 pit and the bottom of the air pit in the Ell coal, but could not descend the cross-cut in the direction of the Blind coal for the reason that the water had not been lowered sufficiently.

Returning to the colliery on the 26th of January we descended the new air pit again, and obtained access to four working places in the Blind coal. As the ventilation had not been fully restored we did not proceed further into the workings. We saw, however, the road by which the five workers were rescued by the manager and others. This road is a cross-cut mine about 60 yards in length rising at an angle of 45° from the Blind coal to the bottom of the new air shaft. We found it a suitable road for means of escape from the workings when there was no cube or furnace burning. At the foot of the cross-cut we saw the furnace, which occupied a part of the road where it was 10 feet wide by four feet high - the full width of the furnace, including walls, was five feet, leaving a walking space of five feet between the outer wall and the side of the road. At the time of the inrush, and previously, this space was closed by sheet-iron nailed to a crown at the roof. This sheet was erected to cause a draught over the furnace fire. Before the cross-cut mine could be used as a means of escape, the furnace fire would require to be raked out, the sheet-iron pulled down, and a rest taken to enable the mine itself to cool down. This was done by the men who escaped in that direction. According to John Wilson the furnace fire took ten minutes to rake out, and after waiting ten minutes longer they were able to pass up the drift to the new air pit B and so escaped.

With regard to the air pit near to the winding shaft and which the officials looked upon as the second outlet for the blind coal, it was suggested that as steam from a pump was exhausted into

it, it was unsuitable as a second outlet. Evidence was however given at the Inquiry to show, that while steam was exhausted into the pit a man could and had worked in it for half an hour at a time without ill effects.

There appeared to me to be no real suggestion at the Inquiry that No. 41 pit was not provided with a second outlet such as is required by the Coal Mines Regulation Act, and even supposing the exhaust steam to have rendered the air-pit unavailable, the new air-pit B by which the five persons escaped would alone have fulfilled the terms of the Statute. It was a most unfortunate circumstance in connection with the disaster, that the 10 men who lost their lives attempted to escape in a different direction apparently under a misapprehension that the one escape shaft was more easily available than the other, and it is not unlikely that the knowledge of the existence of a ventilating furnace at the "new air pit" led them to make the mistake.

Conclusions

The primary cause of the disaster was the working of the E11 coal from No. 41 pit where the surface cover was only 18 feet thick. In the course of time the E11 coal roof which formed part of the cover deteriorated and collapsed with the gravel and sand above when the surface was flooded during the night.

The question naturally arises why the management allowed this colliery to work when the surface cover in the E11 coal was only 18 feet thick and underneath land known to be subject to occasional flooding.

As previously stated, the same seam was worked in an adjoining colliery by the stoop and room method 60 years ago. The stoops or pillars left then to support the surface were three yards, or thereabouts, square, not only under the low-lying land, but under the river itself where the cover was less than 18 feet.

The condition of these old workings was ascertained through an encroachment having been made into the Caprington Estate, and they were found open and dry. The owners

thereupon continued to work the E11 coal, but in doing so left stoops five yards instead of three yards square until five years ago when, owing to the roof becoming softer, they stopped the working altogether, and confined their attention to the Blind coal seam, 15 fathoms below. As no inrush of water occurred, and the roof of the old E11 coal workings had remained intact for so long a period, the management appear to have considered there was no real danger of surface water getting into the pit, and consequently continued to work the Blind coal seam until the time of the disaster. The Blind coal workings were underneath the E11 coal, and another question arose as to whether the working of the lower seam contributed to the cause of the accident.

I made a careful inspection of the Blind Coal workings afterwards with this thought in view and found no perceptible indication whatever of crush or creep to show that the lower working had "pulled" the workings above. On the other hand it was ascertained at the inquiry that falls of roof had occurred in the E11 coal when that seam was worked from No. 41 pit, and also that there had been previous "sits" in the surface in the vicinity of the subsidence which later on caused the disaster, and yet the ground had previously proved impervious to an inrush of water. Mr. Hugh S. Dunn, the managing partner of the firm, and a mining engineer of long experience, stated at the inquiry that this was due to the strata clotting and filling up the surface breaks, and that it was owing to this fact, and to experience derived from the solidity of the old workings under the river, he had formed the opinion that it was quite safe to work out the E11 coal, and thereafter to take out the blind coal at a lower level.

Mr. Gibson, the manager of the pit, however, seems to have had some misgiving as to the safety of the workers on one occasion in 1904 when the surface was flooded, for he withdrew the men from the mine more as he described it "as a precaution as regards the river itself" than from fear of the flooded surface, and evidence

was also led at the inquiry to show that the men themselves had had fears as to their own safety, for a worker named Harry Stewart spoke of one occasion that occurred a year ago when most of the men left the pit. Later on, however, as nothing happened apparently they regained confidence, and the working of the pit thereafter continued until the night of the accident.

It seems very doubtful whether the owners were justified by the experiences above quoted in continuing to work the pit. Under normal conditions, that is to say, when there was no flooding of the surface, it was evidently comparatively safe to work the mine, but had the management appreciated or recognised the effect that percolation of water and consequent saturation of the E11 coal roof might have on some part of the roof softer than the rest, I think they would have elected to keep the men out of the mine when flooding of the surface existed or was anticipated. The Mines Act contains no provision as to precautions to be taken when working coal near to the surface.

[Report by Thomas H Mottram. Inspector of Mines]

Monday 12 December 2011

Figures were there, but buried deep

Extract from Herald Sun, Aus



The MCA was quick to jump to its own defence. Source: The Australian

THE slowest Australian, the powerful and wealthy Minerals Council of Australia, was, predictably, quick out of the blocks last week.

It was right and I was wrong.

It does publish on its website the damning up-to-date statistics of deaths at Australian mines.

I wrote last Monday that it was interesting that the Safety and Health section of the MCA's website carried no figures beyond the year 2007-2008. That year had been the safest ever for the industry. In the following year deaths at mines quadrupled.

It was drawn to my attention that in a graph at the bottom of page 14 of the MCA's annual report there was a single bar that showed how many fatalities there had been at mines. I apologise. I was wrong.

Nonetheless, I took the MCA to task for being unable, over almost four years, to count to 16. That was the number of deaths at mines in the year after its last published results on its Safety and Health website. A spokesman said there was a lag in producing safety and health reports due to circumstances beyond the MCA's control.

"The 2008-2009 report will be online soon," he added, angrily.

I knew that they'd get their act together sooner or later. Probably later.

The website was updated at the weekend. In any case, if their annual report can record the deaths at Australia's mine sites, where is this "lag" he speaks of?

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BARRIER

Something that bars or keeps out. Barrier pillars are solid blocks of coal left between two mines or sections of a mine to prevent accidents due to inrushes of water, gas, or from explosions or a mine fire

-Ed