



Mining Accident News No.1201

9 to 19 January 2012

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Monday 9 January 2012

USA: Lucky Friday silver shaft closed

Extract from Shoshone News Press, USA

MULLAN — In the middle of Friday afternoon, there were about 20 vehicles in the Lucky Friday Mine's parking lot. The wheel atop the iconic green headframe was not spinning.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration has closed the Silver Shaft, said MSHA spokesperson Amy Louviere, because "the shaft inspection revealed hazards associated with falling material."

Hecla Mining Company officials, who own the mine, would not confirm or deny the closure.

"The investigation is ongoing," said Hecla spokesperson Melanie Hennessey. "That has not changed, and it hasn't been completed yet."

MSHA closed the mine after two recent accidents, causing seven injuries and one death. The plan was to re-open the mine in the end of February after a new haulage way was complete, which would bypass damage caused by December's injurious rock burst. Now, sources close to the mine say, that project could be put off until the Silver Shaft is up and running again.

Last time a similar situation happened, sources reported, the mine was closed for two months.

As of last week, Hecla reported that 70 percent of its employees were put to work on projects besides mining and drilling, and they expected that number to increase in the near future. Now, without a second escapeway from the mine, few workers can be underground. Qualified employees have been given the option to work at other Hecla properties until the Lucky Friday is back in production.

Wednesday 11 January 2012

USA: 29 W.Va. families settle in Upper Big Branch deaths

Extract from USA Today, USA

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. – A mining company has settled wrongful death lawsuits with families of all 29 victims of West Virginia's Upper Big Branch disaster, an attorney for the estates of two miners said Tuesday.



In April 2010, Michelle McKinney talks to the media in Naoma, W.Va. McKinney's father, Benny Willingham, 61, was killed in an explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Coal Mine.

Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources did not confirm the agreement or otherwise comment, but attorney Mark Moreland said the final deals were cut Tuesday afternoon after a marathon mediation session. He said Alpha also settled lawsuits by at least seven miners who were injured in the April 2010 blast, the worst U.S. mine disaster in four decades.

Although some lawsuits had long since been settled, mediation of the final 13 began last week and continued through Tuesday. Moreland, who represented the estates of miners Ronald Lee Maynor and William Griffith, would not disclose the terms of the agreements, which will still require court approval.

"It's some compensation for a loss that can never be fully compensated," he said. "At this point, we await the action of the U.S. attorney. I think some people behind bars might bring complete closure to the matter."

Just weeks after the blast, Massey offered \$3 million to each family, the daughter of one victim told The Associated Press at the time. Some accepted, but most refused, saying the lives of their loved ones had no price tags.

Because the latest settlements are confidential, some relatives on Tuesday told The Associated Press they cannot comment.

Alpha spokesman Ted Pile said the company has been in discussions for several days with families and their attorneys to reach a settlement.

"We respect the confidential nature of those discussions and consequently we're not able to comment at this time," Pile said in a statement.

Alpha inherited the mine and the lawsuits when it bought Massey Energy last summer. It has since settled several unrelated lawsuits against other Massey operations. A company spokesman said last month Alpha was eager to shed the legacy problems and move forward.

In December, Alpha reached a \$210 million settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice that spares the corporation criminal prosecution. Individuals, however, can still be prosecuted — as many families have publicly demanded.

So far, one person has been held accountable in criminal court: Former security chief Hughie Elbert Stover was convicted in November of lying to investigators and trying to destroy mine records. He is awaiting sentencing.

The DOJ settlement included \$46.5 million in restitution to the victims' families, guaranteeing them and two survivors of the blast \$1.5 million apiece. That \$1.5 million will be deducted from the wrongful death settlements.

Separate investigations by the Mine Safety and Health Administration, the United Mine Workers of America and an independent panel appointed by former Gov. Joe Manchin have all agreed on what caused the blast.

They determined that Massey allowed highly explosive methane gas and coal dust to

accumulate at Upper Big Branch, and that worn and broken cutting equipment created the spark that ignited the fuel. Broken and clogged water sprayers allowed a mere flare-up to turn into an inferno that ripped through miles of underground tunnels and killed men instantly.

In its final report, MSHA said the root cause of the explosion was Massey's "systematic, intentional and aggressive efforts" to conceal life-threatening problems. MSHA said mine managers went so far as to maintain two sets of pre-shift inspection books — an accurate one for itself, and a fake one to throw off regulators.

Kiwi hurt in Australian mine

Extract from stuff.co.nz

A former Hamilton man has been injured in a mining accident in Western Australia.

Christopher McKay, 26, has a fractured pelvis and suspected spinal injuries, father Joseph McKay said.

He was optimistic his son would recover fully saying, "as I understand it he's going to be fine".

Christopher McKay was one of three miners injured when sheets of metal mesh, which were leaning against a wall in an underground section of the mine, fell on them.



SEVERE INJURIES: Former Hamilton man Christopher McKay is in hospital after a mine accident in Western Australia.

The accident occurred at the Agnew Gold Mine, owned by South African multinational Gold Fields, about 1000km northeast of Perth.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service sent two planes to collect the three who were described as being in a serious but stable condition.

Doctors and nursing staff attended to the miners at the scene before they were flown to Perth and taken to Royal Perth Hospital.

Joseph McKay said he had two other sons living in Perth, and the summation from one of those was that Christopher is "pretty banged up, he's extremely tired and very sore".

Christopher's moved to Western Australia about four years ago, and was based in Perth with his wife and two children. Joseph McKay said he, too, was in the process of moving to Perth, and had already been booked to fly over on Friday after selling up in Hamilton.

Christopher was a former student of St Paul's Collegiate School and St John's College in Hamilton.

USA: Mining Accident Reported in Boone County

Extract from WSAZ3 News Channel, USA

BOONE COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A miner had to be taken to the hospital following an on-the-job accident in Boone County.

State officials say the accident involved a rib roll.

The accident happened at the Brody Mine in Wharton about 8:15 p.m. Wednesday.

The miner was taken to the hospital but is expected to be okay.

Officials did not release the miners name.

Thursday 12 January 2012

Alaska lost 2 miners in 2011

U.S. mining fatalities 2nd lowest in more than 100 years

Extract from JuneauEmpire.com

The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration recently released data on mine fatalities. Nationwide, 37 miners died in work-related accidents in 2011, compared to more than 70 the year prior.

While 2011 wasn't the most deadly year on record for Alaska's mining industry, the death of two miners makes it close. Three miners were killed in one accident in 2007.

Mill operator Michael J. Murray, 39, was killed in a fall at Fairbanks Gold Mining's Fort Knox Mine in June. Murray fell 60 feet through two open hatches in the rock crusher building. Mine Safety officials found the accident occurred "because management failed to ensure that it had policies and procedures in place so persons could safely remove any dust that accumulated around an uncovered opening on the dump floor where there was a danger of falling," according to a MSHA report.

Coeur d'Alene Mines-owned Kensington Mine lost a miner in September.

30-year-old Juneau resident Joe Tagaban was killed in an accident involving debris from a blast. Tagaban had drilled a hole into a pre-existing void. A blast traveled through the borehole "blowing small rock and debris onto the victim," according to MSHA's initial report.

Alaska has lost seven miners since 2001. A low number compared to the deadliest states in which to be a miner — Alabama with 39 miners killed, Kentucky with 94 and West Virginia with 130.

"Mining deaths are preventable," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of Labor for mine safety and health. "The year that the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 passed, 273

miners died and, since that time, fatality numbers have steadily declined. It takes the entire mining community to continue to reach new milestones in health and safety. Miners need the reassurance that they will return home safe and healthy after each shift."

Three killed, two trapped in E China gold mine accident

Extract from Xinhua

Three people have been killed and two others remain trapped after entering a gold mine in east China's Shandong province, local authorities said Thursday.

The accident occurred on Wednesday night, when five workers were lowered into a desolate gold mine belonging to the Rushan Jinhua Mining Company in the city of Rushan, according to a statement from the Rushan municipal government.

The workers drained water out of the shaft for 10 days before entering it to look into the possibility of discovering more gold there.

Three workers were lifted out of the shaft early Thursday morning but died after they were sent to a local hospital.

An initial investigation indicated that all three choked to death. But an autopsy is still needed to determine whether they were poisoned or suffocated from lack of oxygen, sources with the hospital said.

Rescuers are searching for the two workers who remain trapped.

An investigation into the accident is under way.

NZ: Pike River probe set to examine blast's cause

Extract from nzherald.co.nz

The Pike River Royal Commission of Inquiry will hear from former mine managers and Australian experts next month, when it finally asks 'what happened?'

Fifteen months after 29 men lost their lives in an underground explosion, the commission has so far spent weeks probing the search and rescue effort and the Pike River Coal Company's set up, and is now ready to look into what caused the fatal blast.

Some evidence has been temporarily suppressed, but early hints have emerged:

- Pike River logs books in the month before the disaster recorded soaring gas levels, and a leaking gas drainage line.
- Miners had been repeatedly caught taking contraband underground, including cigarette lighters, and some gas sensors had been tampered with.
- There were problems with the new underground fan.
- When Mines Rescue reviewed footage of the portal, they noticed a rag used to indicate airflow was behaving oddly in the minutes before the explosion.
- The commission itself has identified hydro mining as a 'prime suspect', although there may not have been an ignition source there. However, it was the gassiest part of the mine and there had been one roof collapse there.

One of the most intriguing pieces of information is a recording between the control room on the surface and the coal face 2.4km underground, in the lead up to the explosion. The water pumps to the coal-cutting machine were turned on only a minute or two before the blast.

Control room operator Dan Duggan initially made contact after turning the water on, when someone replied: "Hello Dan, who you looking for?" followed by an unidentified, muffled noise. All further contact was lost.

Mr Duggan's brother Chris was among the 29 dead.

The commission resumes on February 8 with evidence from Department of Labour services and support general manager Brett Murray,

followed by Australian David Reece, who provided the department's investigative team with expert advice on mine design and ventilation.

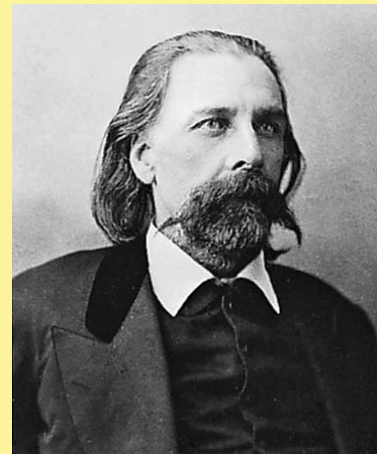
In week two, another Australian mining expert, Tony Reczek, will discuss electrical issues.

Former Pike River mine manager Doug White and technical services manager Pieter van Rooyan will also appear.

Appearing late last year, expert witness Dr Kathleen Callaghan, from the University of Auckland, when describing the disaster said the cause was probably like Swiss cheese - all the holes lined up on that fateful November day.

The hearings are held at the Greymouth District Court and are open to the public.

Quote of the week



"Silence is one of the hardest arguments to refute."

Josh Billings
Pen name of American humorist
Henry Wheeler Shaw (1818-1885)

Friday 13 January 2012

BHP suspends work at S. Africa colliery after fatality

Extract from Reuters US Edition

BHP Billiton's South African coal unit has suspended mining activities at the underground operations of its Khutala colliery in South Africa

after a fatality at the mine, the company said on Friday.

"The fatality occurred during the performance of maintenance work on a conveyor belt in the underground operations and the incident has been reported to the relevant authorities," BHP Billiton Energy Coal South Africa (BECSA) said.

The accident occurred on Jan. 12.

"Mining activities at the underground operation have been suspended and the company has commenced an investigation in order to establish the circumstances of the accident," it added.

Report: Shifting wheel assembly killed Swanville man

Extract from sctimes.com

MILACA — A preliminary report from the Mine Safety and Health Administration indicates a shifting wheel assembly killed a 41-year-old rural Swanville man during an accident last month at a Knife River Corp. worksite.

According to the report, a set of wheels was being placed on a conveyor about 11 a.m. Dec. 8 to move it from the Gardner Aggregate pit. A front-end loader was used to lift the conveyor. The loader bucket dropped, allowing the frame of the conveyor to strike the wheel assembly and shift it into Scott Armstrong, a crusher operator with eight years experience. A previous report from the Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office indicated he was struck in the head. Armstrong was one of three employees at the pit at 19751-105th Ave., according to the report from the MSHA, a division of the U.S. Department of Labor. The report does not represent final determinations.

It was the 15th of 16 fatalities nationwide during 2011 in mining industries, according to the MSHA. Final reports, which include conclusions and enforcement actions, have yet to be filed in regard to eight of those deaths.

There were 10 mining fatalities in Minnesota from 2001-2011. Two occurred last year, with the other happening Aug. 9 in Fairfax. There have been no other deaths in Central Minnesota in more than 15 years.

Armstrong, a Royalton High School graduate, worked for Knife River, formerly Bauerly Brothers, from 1999-2008. He returned to the company in June. He is survived by his wife, Donna, and their five children.

To see the preliminary report, visit www.msha.gov.

Qld: Body building 'drugs' worry mine industry

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Queensland Resources Council (QRC) says the State Government needs to examine the safety of a body building supplement being used by some mine workers.

QRC chief executive Michael Roche says the product contains a stimulant which has been banned in European Union countries, Canada and the US military.



Photo: Mr Roche says the State Government should consider listing it on the Drugs Misuse Act. (ABC TV - file image)

He says its use is becoming more prevalent on the state's mine sites.

"We're starting to hear stories along those lines," he said.

"We think it's time for the Government to have a close look at these body building drugs.

"The product is legal and available online or over the counter but one of the ingredients in the

particular product is an ingredient that's actually banned in large parts of the world."

Mr Roche says the State Government should consider listing it on the Drugs Misuse Act.

"Inside of the so-called supplements are drugs ingredients," he said.

"They are readily available here in Queensland in Australia, so we'd be wanting the authorities to have a close look at these drugs.

"They are really a stimulant and if they are being used on site, then we need to know that their use is a safe use."

Mr Roche says mine sites should be able to use all drug testing methods to maximise safety.

He says currently a mine manager can only apply drug and alcohol testing that is approved by the unions.

Mr Roche says a review of national standards should consider scrapping that legislation.

"We think that mining is clearly a hazardous industry and we need to arm the mine manager with all the tools necessary to ensure that drugs and alcohol are not adding to mine site hazards," he said.

"Therefore the mine manager needs to have available saliva testing, urine testing - all the tools that are necessary."

Qld: Uni researchers to tackle mine fatigue

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

CQUniversity is set to step up research into fatigue issues in the mining industry.

The university has acquired an Adelaide research unit, which has been looking into issues such as shift work and fly-in, fly-out workforces.

Vice-chancellor professor Scott Bowman says the unit will work with existing programs at the university.

"One of our new programs is accident forensics which is looking at why accidents in mines, in railways and even air crash investigations, why those crashes happen," he said.

"So this group will be linking in with the group that we've got working already here in central Queensland.

"Looking at things like the impact of shift systems, the impact of fly-in, fly-out, looking at the impact of fatigue in the workplace, on workplace health and safety and they really are the go-to group in the area.

"So as you can imagine a lot of the mines and the heavy industry in central Queensland go to that group."

This week, staff have started moving into the old CSIRO laboratories in Rockhampton, which were closed by the Federal Government in 2009.

Scientists will use the facility to develop a vaccine for middle ear infections, which lead to health problems in Indigenous communities.

Bundaberg campus

Meanwhile, the university says Bundaberg is its fastest growing campus.

A total of 1,700 students have been offered places at CQUniversity after a record number of applications, including more than 200 in Bundaberg.

Head of campus Philip Clift says many students are enrolling in the new degrees offered this year.

"We're offering the bachelor of psychology program face-to-face, we're got a new program in science and agricultural food science, we've got programs in allied health and we've got a really interesting program in accident forensics," he said.

Va. mining accidents: 3 injured in 14-hour period

Extract from The Bluefield Daily Telegraph, USA

OAKWOOD, Va. — Three coal mine workers suffered injuries on the job at two different coal mines over a 14-hour period from Wednesday night through Thursday morning, according to a spokesman for the Virginia Division of Mines Minerals and Energy.

Two coal miners were injured at about 9 p.m., Wednesday night at Consol's Buchanan No. 1 Mine and a contract employee was injured at about 10:30 a.m., on Thursday morning at the Dominion No. 7 Mine. Both mines are located in the general vicinity of Oakwood, Va., according to Mike Abbott, DMME spokesman.

"The contract employee working was injured on Thursday was riding on a tram when his hooded jacket became caught on a roof bolt," Abbott said. "His clothing came up on him and caused the zipper on his coat to cut him on the neck. The gash he received required a few stitches in his neck. At 1:25 p.m. (Thursday) he was about to be released."

In the earlier incident on Wednesday night, two coal miners were working on a damaged high-pressure water line in the Buchanan No. 1 Mine, when the valve that was under pressure blew off and broke into pieces.

"One of the pieces struck a miner in the head," Abbott said. "He was transported from the mine to Clinch Valley Medical Center in Richlands, Va., where he was later transported to Bristol Regional Medical Center. The weather conditions prevented emergency responders from using a helicopter to transport the victim."

Abbott said the other victim was transported to Clinch Valley Medical Center where he was treated and released. He did not release the names of any of the victims.

"The DMME and the Mine Safety and Health Administration responded to both incidents," Abbott said. State and federal mine inspectors

were still investigating both sites Thursday afternoon.

NZ: Police near decision on Pike charges

Extract from nzherald.co.nz

Police are on the verge of a decision on criminal charges over the Pike River mine disaster.

A royal commission of inquiry into the mine explosions that killed 29 workers resumes next month and police investigators are closing in on a finding that will dictate which people or groups, if any, are prosecuted.

"We should be at a point within the next week or so where we will have a recommendation," officer in charge Detective Superintendent Peter Read told the *Herald* yesterday.

The Department of Labour has already laid 25 health and safety charges against Pike River Coal, its former chief executive Peter Whittall and VLI Drilling.

The royal commission is required to report its findings no later than March 31. Mr Read said police had been following what came out of the commission hearings, but had largely relied on their own work - producing over 25,000 pages of transcripts from interviews.

"It makes it a little bit harder with the fact you can't actually get into the mine. The opinion the experts are giving us is based on information without a scene examination."

Saturday 14 January 2012

UK: Fund for families of Gleision Colliery disaster miners raises nearly £1m

Extract from WalesOnline.co.uk

A FUND set up to help the families of four South Wales miners killed in the Gleision Colliery disaster has almost topped £1m.

Shadow Secretary of State for Wales Peter Hain, said the response to the Swansea Valley

Miners' Appeal had been "absolutely amazing" and reflected a "deep well of sympathy" from people across South Wales



Peter Hain

The appeal was set up to raise money for the families of miners Phillip Hill, Charles Breslin, David Powell and Garry Jenkins just two days after the accident happened last September.

Funds have now reached £970,000 in the four months since the accident at the Gleision mine near Cilybebyll, Pontardawe.

Neath MP Mr Hain said funds had already been used to buy an electric wheelchair and a specially-adapted car for the grown-up daughter of a miner, who is severely disabled.

"Nobody, least of all me, imagined as we launched [the appeal] in the early morning of the Saturday after the tragedy on Thursday that we would get anything like this," Mr Hain told the BBC.

"I mean, even to have envisaged £100,000 let alone 10 times that is absolutely mind-blowing.

"It goes to the deep well of support and sympathy and really deep, deep anguish right through the communities of South Wales, particularly the former coal-mining communities, or existing coal-mining communities."

The funds are being administered by three trustees – the Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Wales Wayne Thomas, and Tower Colliery saviour Tyrone O'Sullivan.

Mr O'Sullivan said yesterday: "It has been an incredibly surprising response.

"The effect it has had throughout the world shows that miners are still a breed of people that are very much respected, never mind where they are in the world."

He added: "We will touch a million, I have no doubts about that, and when that is achieved – it will be fantastic."

He said part of the overwhelming response had been down to the shock of a mining tragedy in Wales for the first time in several years. "It is clear that Wales had never expected to see a mining tragedy again, and it came as a shock," said Mr O'Sullivan.

"There are not many pits left in Britain, never mind Wales, and we had multiple deaths in this tragedy, and that caught everyone's attention."

Sunday 15 January 2012

Seven killed in China illegal mining accident

Extract from hindustantimes.com

Seven farmers were killed and four injured in north China while attempting to illegally blast their way into a mine by using explosives, said the government. As per initial investigation, a group of farmers tried to blast their way into an iron ore in Tang county, Hebei province, late

Friday night. But the explosives suddenly went off and hit the farmers instead, Xinhua quoted the government statement as saying.

Police said they were still in search of the other suspects and probing the source of explosives.

Monday 16 January 2012

Indonesian miner feared dead

Extract from JakartaGlobe

HOPES are fading of saving an Indonesian machine operator missing since a section of the coal mine he was working in collapsed.

The incident, which occurred in early January, happened after the ground the miner was working on in the open-pit mine collapsed, dragging him and machinery 50m below ground, the *Jakarta Globe* said.

"At the time of the incident, the mine was hit with heavy rains, sending a massive landslide," police chief Adj Sr Comr Hermansyah was quoted as saying.

Despite grave fears for the man, rescuers are attempting to find the miner, who was a heavy machinery operator for subcontractor Kasuari.

"Police have been on the scene and the evacuation efforts are ongoing."

The mine is located in Indonesia's Indragiri Hulu regency and is owned by private coal mining company Riau Bara Harum.

The *Jakarta Globe* said Riau BaraHarum and Kasuari officials were leading the search effort, which had been slowed down by the adverse weather conditions.

USA: Panel aims to improve mine safety programs

Extract from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, USA

Miner self-rescue techniques, equipment and training are much better now than they were before the Sago mine disaster in January 2006, but an interdisciplinary committee of the National Academies has begun a yearlong study to determine if they could be better.

The interdisciplinary committee, which held its first three-day meeting in southwestern Pennsylvania last week, will review technological advances that could help miners

escape and study how judgement and decision making is affected in a mining explosion or cave-in situation.

"Sago was a turning point in that it highlighted how we'd fallen behind a bit in the technologies available to miners to help them escape," said Jeffery Kohler, associate director for mining and director of the Office of Mine Safety and Health Research for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, addressing the committee during its Wednesday open session.

Only one of 13 miners trapped for two days in the Sago Mine explosion and collapse in West Virginia survived. The accident triggered state and federal investigations and regulations requiring better training and deployment of safety technologies, including refuge chambers, safety lifeline cables with directional markings and better communications equipment.

"We have training products and technologies, but there is a need to integrate them," Mr. Kohler said. "What are the skill sets miners should have to improve their chances for escape? What kind of water training is needed? What technologies for communications or breathing apparatus are most effective? We're still missing that piece, and we will benefit from having that filled in."

Committee members raised questions about how miner escape is influenced by mine size, company economics, how the use of breathing apparatus affects communication underground, training programs and language used on mine signage.

Dennis O'Dell, United Mine Workers of America administrator for occupational health and safety and a member of the committee, said there's little consistency in emergency response plans from one mine to another.

Mr. Kohler said that while there's no indication that current mine safety practices are lacking, NIOSH's request for a National Academies study is an attempt to be proactive. He said the committee's review of technologies, training and

research -- along with public input -- will help NIOSH decide on future research areas.

"If something terrible happens, we want miners to be prepared to have the best chance of survival," Mr. Kohler said. "A lot has been done, but we're not sure if everything has been done to have them prepared for what they will face."

The National Academies produced mine safety reports in 1970 and 1981, but mine safety regulators didn't follow recommendations that included miner rescue chambers, improved breathing devices and additional mine rescue teams.

Following the Wednesday meeting, the 10-member committee was scheduled to tour Consol Energy's Bailey Mine in Greene County on Thursday and hold another committee meeting Friday in Washington County.

Release of a final report is expected early next year.

Tuesday 17 January 2012

USA: Personal tragedies spur W.Va. mine safety proposal

Extract from Canadian Business

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — For two West Virginia lawmakers who lost fathers in coal mining accidents, preventing disasters like the 2010 Upper Big Branch explosion has taken a personal turn with Monday's introduction of a bipartisan safety proposal.

House Speaker Rick Thompson was not yet born when a roof fall killed his father in 1952 at age 21. Delegate Charlene Marshall's dad died in the mines when she was 6. Now 78, the Monongalia County Democrat later lost her stepfather in a coal mine accident as well.

One of six children, Marshall recalls fleeing to a closet to smell her father's sweater in the years following his death — like Thompson's, in a roof fall — "to make me feel better."

"I would never want any young child to go through some of the things that I did," Marshall told The Associated Press on Monday.

Thompson and Marshall are among the 11 lawmakers sponsoring Monday's bill. In addition to increased training and stiffer sanctions for violations, the measure also proposes improving the role of miners' families during investigations. This would include allowing these survivors or their representatives to sit in on investigator interviews.

For years, both Thompson and Marshall knew little of what killed their fathers, the two legislators told AP. Their families had relied instead on word-of-mouth from other miners or relatives.

Marshall said she was campaigning door-to-door once when a voter told her he may have helped carry her father's body out of his Osage mine. Only recently did Thompson learn of a brief federal report on his father's accident, which differed both from the family's version and an account in a newspaper clipping unearthed by a constituent.

"Family members want to know what happened. When they're in the dark, it makes the hurt that much harder to stand," said Thompson, D-Wayne.

The bill also orders a review of the three reports issued so far by Upper Big Branch investigators. This provision's goal: to identify and then remedy the problems with enforcing safety standards each cited in the wake of the worst U.S. coal mining disaster in four decades.

The explosion in the underground Raleigh County mine killed 29 miners. All three reports — from a special independent investigation, the United Mine Workers union and federal regulators — fault then-owner Massey Energy Co. for allowing the conditions that led to the blast. The federal report, issued late last year by the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, further blamed the disaster's root cause on Massey's "systematic, intentional and

aggressive efforts" to conceal life-threatening problems.

This study could trigger a wide-ranging rewrite of state safety regulations and sanctions for violators, Thompson said.

"We've tried to recognize the hard work behind the investigative reports, and to prevent these things from occurring," the speaker said.

A related provision would create a special investigative panel to review any future underground accident, specifically to recommend legislation if deemed necessary.

"I hope we never use that panel," Thompson said. "But we've noticed a weakness in the system."

Contributing to or permitting a regulatory violation would become a felony under the bill. Also responding to Upper Big Branch, the measure proposes making it a felony to announce when inspectors enter a mine, punishable by a fine and one to five years in prison. Though illegal under federal law, investigators found that the mine's guards would radio such alerts. Other provisions would double the penalties for lying to investigators, to up to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine, and more than triple the civil penalties for health and safety violations from \$3,000 to \$10,000.

The bill would make permanent a recently created toll-free line for anonymous whistleblower tips, and require the phone number to be posted prominently at all mines. It would allow miners to leave areas they reasonably believe to be unsafe, and extend their pay from the end of that day's shift to up to 10 days when safety violations force a mine's idling.

The measure also would require mining machines to shut off automatically once methane gas levels reach a certain level. The state's Board of Coal Mine Health and Safety reviewed this provision and recommended the proposed methane level, Thompson said.

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin also plans to introduce mine safety legislation this session, prompted in part by Upper Big Branch. He told the Legislature during last week's State of the State address that he will propose whistleblower protections as well as new standards for tamping down explosive coal dust and mandatory sensors on long wall mining machines for detecting methane.

Thompson said the governor's bills are given priority in the House, but he hopes that Monday's proposal would serve as a companion measure or provide amendments to Tomblin's. The speaker said he's leaving those decisions to the House Judiciary Committee, which would review both.

Wednesday 18 January 2012

NZ: Pike River body recovery closer

Extract from stuff.co.nz

Pike River receivers are on the brink of the first major breakthrough towards recovering the bodies of the 29 mine workers since they were killed in an explosion more than a year ago.

However, receivers estimate it could be up to four years before access to the mine can be properly established.

Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn is pushing ahead with plans to establish a trust to speed the recovery process.

Kokshoorn will meet Prime Minister John Key in the next few weeks to discuss the trust, originally proposed by receivers PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Kokshoorn said Key had indicated he supported the trust, and receivers were keen to be at the discussion.

Under the guidelines suggested by the receivers, the trust administration would include a body of mining experts, able to advise on the recovery process.

Pike River receiver John Fisk said a specific amount of money would be set apart to do that work, for any prospective mine purchaser. Any sale would include a clause of "best endeavour" to retrieve the bodies, as long as it was safe to do so.

Kokshoorn hoped funding the recovery for any prospective buyer would result in the bodies of the 29 men being returned to their families within the next year.

"It comes down to money," he said.

"With the money in place the access could be faster."

However Fisk urged caution and suggested a recovery time frame of two to four years was likely because of the technical difficulties involved.

As well, the royal commission into the mining disaster had not concluded.

"There could be changes to mining legislation as a result, we just don't know yet."

The body recovery cost would run into the millions, he said.

Next Saturday, the first major step towards that recovery would take place.

A 200 millimetre horizontal borehole was being drilled about 100 metres into the mine shaft this week.

On Saturday a team would arrive to pour grout down the borehole. "This sets like concrete and will seal off the rest of the mine away from the shaft," Kokshoorn said.

The mine contains an explosive mixture of methane and oxygen, and with it sealed off, workers would be able to access the rockfall blocking off the mine shaft from the mine.

"This will give us access to 2.3 kilometres [of the mine]. We have never got this far. This is a big breakthrough," Kokshoorn said.

However, even if access to the mine were established, there was no guarantee the miners would be found.

"We're under no illusions, but we want to give it our best shot," Kokshoorn said. "This weighs heavily on us. You don't leave a man down on the battlefield."

China: Shelter means hope for trapped miners

Extract from ChinaDaily.com.cn

CHANGSHA - A manufacturer in Central China's Hunan province announced that its safety shelter can sustain 10 people for 111 hours during mine accidents.

China's top safety administration has called on all mines to finish construction of emergency relief systems by 2015 in a directive that is driving more than 100 companies in the country to develop the chambers for a market potentially worth 400 billion yuan (\$63.3 billion), according to insiders.



A mining safety chamber to shelter miners during accidents is on display in Changsha, capital of Hunan province, on Monday. It can help 12 people survive disasters underground. Chen Yong / for China Daily

"It is a place that I can move into and sleep and eat well inside," said Wang Ying, coming out of the closed compartment on Sunday after 111 hours with other nine people.

"From biscuits and water to magazines and cards, all the necessities normally found on a train can be found there," Wang said, referring to how he passed the "boring" days.

Resembling a train carriage, the box chamber went through tests in which electricity and air supply were cut off from it, and surrounding temperature was constantly kept at 55 C.

Wang Shengchu, deputy general manager of the manufacturer, said the steel shell of the mobile capsule can withstand pressure as high as 60 kilograms per square centimeter.

And easily accessible meters in the insulated compartment give a reading of the temperature as well as the concentration of gas and toxins outside.

The toilet in the space is specially designed. Excrement goes into a locked space before being discharged in order to prevent toxic gas from entering the capsule.

"The chamber also provides a comfortable living room, dehumidified air and a radio speaker in addition to the essentials," Wang added.

Jiang Zuntao, head of the development team, said the team studied similar products made by US and Australian companies, but the chamber still could not protect miners in extreme situations, such as a devastating explosion.

"Remaining hopeful is the most difficult part of surviving an accident for miners. We want our chamber to give hope to those who are trapped."

A supervisor from the Mining Products Safety Approval and Certification Center announced that the test was valid and successful.

However, the State Administration of Work Safety and the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety have yet to endorse a set of national specifications for standard safety chambers.

Chen Dongke, an official with the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety, said on Tuesday that the watchdog's tech-equipment department has been soliciting public opinions and is reviewing feedback from local authorities and stakeholders on a draft of general specifications for refuge chambers since September 2011.

Nearly 2,000 people in China perished in coal mine accidents in 2011, according to mining safety officials. It was the first time in 10 years that the number of casualties was brought down to less than 2,000.

NZ: Pike River Phase Three hearings start 8 Feb

Extract from www.scoop.co.nz

February hearings start Wednesday 8 February
The Commission's hearings on Phase Three entitled What happened at Pike River? will resume in Greymouth at 10.00am on Wednesday 8 February 2012.

Five witnesses are to be called during the hearings which are scheduled to finish by Friday 17 February.

The Commission will examine the cause of the explosions and the mine systems, with a focus on the elements that contributed to the initial explosion.

Australian experts to give evidence
Two Australian experts who gave advice as part of the Department of Labour investigative report will be called on to give insights into what happened at Pike River Coal Ltd.

David Reece, an Australian consultant who provided expertise on mine design and ventilation and Tony Reczek another Australian consultant who provided expertise on electrical issues will be among those to appear at the February hearings.

Pike River Royal Commission February Hearings Witness List

Hearings starting Wednesday 8 February 10.00am

Brett Murray, General Manager, National Services and Support, Department of Labour.

David Reece, Consultant from Australia providing expert advice on mine design, ventilation and other matters to the Department of Labour investigative team.

Hearings starting Monday 13 February 10.00am

Tony Reczek, Consultant from Australia providing expert advice on electrical issues to the Department of Labour investigative team.

Douglas White, Former General Manager, Pike River Coal Ltd.

Pieter van Rooyan, Former Manager, Technical Services, Pike River Coal Ltd.

Phase four: policy aspects work
The Commission is seeking input on the policy issues it needs to address and options for change.

This includes overseas mining regulation and practice, whether extra regulation is needed in New Zealand and the profile of an effective mining inspectorate.

The Commission has developed a series of questions it wants to consider as part of this work. They relate to mining regulation and recognised practice, the interaction between mining and other legal requirements (including conservation and the environment) and the resourcing and administration a mining inspectorate.

The list of questions is available in Minute No.10 (<http://pikeriver.royalcommission.govt.nz/Our-Work#Minutes>)

The Commission expects to seek expert advice on the policy issues, and will also hold discussions with parties most affected by particular policy aspects.

Feedback on policy issues will be included in the final hearings planned for April.

Final submissions and final hearings scheduled for 2 April

A hearing has been scheduled starting on Monday 2 April in Greymouth to hear final submissions and feedback on policy issues.

This is subject to the Commission being granted an extension to its reporting date.

The Commission is seeking final written submissions from participants on any or all matters considered during the inquiry.

The final submissions hearing will provide an opportunity for both factual and policy questions to be debated in a public forum.

Key Dates

Wednesday 8 February – Friday 17 February: Phase 3 hearings

Friday March 16: Policy and final submissions due

Monday 2 April: Final hearings begin in Greymouth.

This week in mining accident history

19 January 1967
Strongman Mine
Greymouth, West Coast, New Zealand
Underground coal mine
19 killed by explosion of fire damp

What happened?



- The state-owned Strongman Mine lies 11 kilometres north-east of Greymouth, and was New Zealand's largest underground coal mine. It had been open since 1939, and had an accident-free record.

- On 19 January, 1967, just after 10:00 am, an explosion blew through the section of the mine known as Green's No 2 Rise.
- In seconds the fireball from the explosion fired through the section, killing 19 of the 240 men who were working in the mine at the time.
- An even bigger disaster was averted when just 140 metres from the point of explosion the fireball struck a wet patch in the tunnel where water was seeping through the walls. The fireball slowed, then went out, and in seconds the danger had passed.
- Within four minutes other teams of miners had reached the tunnel leading to Green's section, but were driven back by poisonous gas and smoke.
- A full evacuation of the mine was ordered, and by 10:20 the police and medical teams had arrived.
- The rescue team, equipped with breathing packs, worked for 14 hours finding the bodies of the dead miners and bringing them to the surface on rail trucks. Often they had to dig their way through falls of coal and rock. Fire damp reached dangerous levels at times, increasing the risk of another explosion.
- The first bodies were brought to the surface at about 1:00 pm. Thirteen hours later the rescue work was held up while the air cleared, and by then 15 bodies had been found.
- After a delay of five hours the rescue work resumed but when the smouldering coal burst into flames, the section where the remaining four bodies were was sealed off.
- Three weeks later two more bodies were brought out, but the last two could not be reached, and were permanently sealed off.
- A mass funeral was held on January 22 at the Karoro Lawn Cemetery in Greymouth.

How many died?

19

Other events and outcomes

- Five of the rescue party were awarded British Empire Medal for their efforts.
- The report of the commission of inquiry stated that two of the Mining Regulations had been broken.
- A shot hole for a charge had been fired in a way which was against the regulations, and had broken through the face to an area where fire damp had built up in some abandoned workings, triggering the explosion.
- The abandoned workings should have been checked for gas.
- Because the Strongman Mine was State-owned, the Government of the time had to pay out between £200,000 and £250,000 in compensation.

Sources

- *Morris, Bruce. Darkest days, Auckland, 1987.*
- *Grayland, Eugene. More New Zealand disasters, Wellington, 1978*

Fire damp

Miners' name for a gas of mostly methane which forms as decaying plant matter turns into coal. It becomes explosive when mixed with a certain amount of air.

Thursday 19 January 2012

Zambia: Worker killed at Chinese operated mine

Extract from www.zambianwatchdog.com

One miner has died in an underground accident at the Chinese owned Collum Coal Mine while two others are battling for their lives at Maamba Hospital in Sinazongwe district.

ZANIS reports that Sinazongwe District Administrative Officer Sokoluku Daka,

Sinazongwe Member of Parliament Richwell Siamunene and Nkanddabwe Ward Councilor Partson Mangunje confirmed the accident that happened on Tuesdays at 13:30 hours.

Mr. Daka named the deceased as Gibson Siachivwenya aged 37 and the two injured person as Wispo Mayiya aged 36, and Dought Mudenda aged 23.

Meanwhile, Sinazongwe Member of Parliament Richwell Siamunene has condemned the incident and attributed it to poor safety measures that the company management have been using to conduct their underground mining activities.

Mr. Siamunene called on the Ministry of Mines to give the public the full details of the report pertaining to the operations of the mine where accidents have continued to occur.

And Nkanddabwe Ward Councilor Partson Mangunje said government should look into the safety of the mine to protect the lives of miners.

Mr. Mangunje said despite the Ministry of Mines officers inspecting all shafts at the mine the public has not been informed about the safety of the Chinese owned Collum Coal mine.

He alleged that management has no qualified personnel to handle the explosives used for blasting underground.

And Geshom Muchindu a miner who was underground at the time of the accident disclosed that the accident occurred after blasting underground.

Mr. Muchindu alleged that before dust settled the Chinese supervisor ordered them to go and work in the tunnel where blasting had just been done.

He said a rock fail on three of the miners and killed one on the spot while the others were severely injured.

And one of the injured, Dought Mudenda also said the Chinese Supervisor only named as Ruin forced them to enter the tunnel where

blasting was done and allegedly threatened them that he would deduct their working hours if they refused.

However, the Chinese supervisors at Shaft three where the accident happened refused to comment and claimed that they did not understand English.

The body of the deceased miner is at Maamba Hospital Mortuary.

S. Africa: Fatality rate persists

Mine safety - Progress made, but not enough

Extract from www.fm.co.za

More than 100 people died in SA's mines last year. The number represents an ongoing failure to meet the industry's target of achieving "zero harm", reiterated over the past decade.

About 300000 people work in SA's deep-level gold and platinum mines, where huge rock pressures add to mining's other major hazard of moving equipment.

Preliminary figures to end-November last year show 116 people died on the mines compared with 128 in 2010 and 168 in 2009. The industry is awaiting the final 2011 figures from the department of mineral resources (DMR). At least another three people died in the first two weeks of January.



Paul Mardon, head of trade union Solidarity's department of occupational health & safety, says many mineworkers were retrenched after 2010 but that the number of deaths has not dropped significantly. This implies more fatalities as a

percentage of the workforce last year than in 2009 or 2010.

He says good progress has been made by the industry since 2007, in consultation with trade unions, but it doesn't seem to have been enough. The effectiveness of measures to make mines safer levelled off last year and may even have deteriorated.

One reason could be that the commitment of senior management to health and safety isn't fully shared by supervisors, who are responsible for production targets as well as safety.

"The dictates of production targets often tend to be predisposed in favour of production and not compliance with safety standards," Mardon says.

National Union of Mineworkers spokesman Lesiba Seshoka agrees. "The mining industry seems to see anything to do with safety as a punishment because it costs production," he says.

"You will find that towards the end of the month, if the production performance is falling behind, team leaders will push hard to catch up, which creates dangerous working conditions. The bonus should be based on both meeting production targets and meeting them safely."

Mardon says many accidents are caused by human error and that it seems workers are no longer listening to the health and safety messages. New and innovative ways have to be found to get those messages through.

A highly emotive issue last year was how often the DMR shut mines temporarily after incidents while investigating the causes. Apart from the costs in lost production, opponents of this move suggest it "breaks the mining rhythm" so when the mine re starts there's an immediate spike in safety incidents.

"Yes, it is true that when a mine is shut it costs production, but companies need to recognise that safety is as important as production and you should invest in both," Seshoka says. "Mines

stopped under section 54 notices can still be maintained. Safer mines are more productive."

Though Gold Fields CEO Nick Holland regularly reiterates at public presentations that "if we cannot mine safely, we will not mine at all", 18 people were killed on Gold Fields mines last year against 17 in 2010. But there's no hint that the company might shut unsafe mines, nor is there any support from the unions for such a move.

Mardon rejects complete closure of unsafe mines as it doesn't benefit the economy, the mines or the workers, he says.

Seshoka says there are other solutions. SA mines should invest in technology used in almost all other mining countries to predict seismicity, so underground workers should be evacuated when the risks are high.

A Chamber of Mines spokesman says it cannot comment until the DMR releases full-year accident statistics. It will then reveal what it will do differently this year to improve safety.

Seshoka takes exception to the suggestion that strict safety rules deter foreign investment. If foreign investors are to build mines in SA in which their employees die, they "must take their money elsewhere", he says.

Paltry fine against UK Coal for miner deaths

Comment from World Socialist Web Site, wsws.org

A class judgement was handed down last month at Sheffield Crown when UK Coal, Britain's largest producer, was ordered to pay a mere £1.2 million after four miners died following safety breaches at two of its collieries.

Anthony Garrigan, 42, Paul Hunt, 45, and Trevor Steeples, 46, died in separate accidents at Daw Mill colliery, near Coventry, in 2006 and 2007. Paul Milner, 44, died after an accident at the now-closed Welbeck Colliery in Nottinghamshire, in 2007.

Even though UK Coal admitted four breaches of Section 2(1) and three breaches of Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Justice MacDuff pointedly told Sheffield Crown Court he would not impose a penalty so high it would “cripple” a firm that has been experiencing economic problems.

The fine ordered was £112,500 in relation to each death and a further £187,500 in costs relating to each case. Justice MacDuff warned family members watching from the public gallery this may mean the fines were lower than some may expect, but according to a BBC report, “urged the families of the dead men to focus on the total combined financial penalty”.

Justice MacDuff continued, “These were, of course, dreadful accidents. They were preventable accidents. However, unlike most criminal acts, there was no intention to kill or injure. ... Mining is and will remain a dangerous occupation. These accidents all occurred in the depths of the Earth.”

Offering balm to corporate Britain, he told Sheffield Crown Court he had a very “difficult exercise to perform” to provide justice for the men’s families, yet not threaten a company which “provided energy to the nation, employment within the nation and a valuable service all round.”

UK Coal was, said the judge, “trading on the edge of viability” and it “would be in no-one’s interest if the company ceased to trade or if it had to reduce further the scope of its operations”.

The judgment should serve as a warning to Britain’s remaining 4,000 miners and the entire working class. A man’s life will not be judged on the basis of the 40 years he had the right to look forward to during his working life and the loss and needs of his family and loved ones. It will be determined by the financial “viability” of the capitalist company and the “scope of its operations”.

All four miners died in not only preventable, but horrific circumstances in the relentless pursuit of corporate profits.

Trevor Steeples, from Nottingham, was suffocated to death by a methane build-up at Daw Mill on June 19, 2006. Two pit managers at Daw Mill, Terence Davison and John Alstead, were cleared of safety breaches in relation to his death by a judge at Sheffield Crown Court in June.

Paul Hunt, from Derbyshire, died after he fell from an underground transporter—which was poorly maintained and had already been declared unfit for passengers—into the path of a train at Daw Mill on August 6, 2006.

Anthony Garrigan, from Thorne, near Doncaster, had been installing bolts into the wall of a tunnel which had a history of collapses when he was crushed by 100 tonnes of coal and stone at the same colliery on January 17, 2007.

Paul Milner, from Nottinghamshire, had been helping to install roof supports so equipment could be salvaged from a coal face where production had already stopped at Welbeck Colliery. He died when a roof fell in on November 3, 2007.

In an earlier hearing, the judge claimed to have read moving tributes from the dead men’s families and patronised them for their comments which he said had avoided “railing or complaining”.

Steeple’s mother said in a statement after the hearing that she was disappointed no individuals had been successfully prosecuted over her son’s death. She was “thankful Trevor doesn’t know all we’ve been through since he was killed and how the system has let him down so badly”.

Tragic incidents continue to occur. Two security guards are in critical condition after they were seriously injured in an explosion on New Years’ Day at Welbeck Colliery. The explosion came from an electrical component in the single-storey sub-station building. Coal production ended at the colliery in May 2010.

A total of 17 miners have died in UK coal mines in the last five years. The rate of injuries and “near misses” has also increased during the same period. In 2011, antiquated conditions in Britain’s remaining mines claimed the lives of an additional five miners. Philip Hill, 44, Charles Breslin, 62, David Powell, 50 and Garry Jenkins, 39, died when Gleision Colliery in the Swansea Valley flooded on September 15. That was followed, less than two weeks later, by the death of Gerry Gibson after a roof fall at Kellingley Colliery, North Yorkshire, on September 28.

Kellingley, known as a “super-pit”, is one of the most productive collieries in Europe, with just 800 miners where it once employed 2,000. It supplies fuel to power stations between Leeds, West Yorkshire and Hull on the east coast, as well as household coal.

In September 2008, Don Cook, 50, was killed in a rock fall. On October 18, 2009, Ian Cameron, 46, died at the colliery after equipment fell on him.

In November, 2010, 218 workers had to be evacuated after an underground methane gas explosion.

The BBC ran a feature last month on Maltby colliery in South Yorkshire, where 70 miners have been recruited to facilitate a new shift pattern. Steve Mace, a coal face worker and National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) official, said that more than 500 workers had applied for the 70 positions.

The onset of the global economic crisis impacted heavily on firms such as UK Coal. At the recent court hearing, the judge stated that he was mindful of the fact that the firm was “under intense economic pressure” following the recession. Mark Turner, counsel for the firm, told the court that shares worth £5 five years ago were recently trading for 34p. He reiterated that UK Coal was in a “very poor way financially” and was implementing a survival plan.

According to *Coal News and Markets*, the price of coal increased from around \$30.00 per short

ton in 2000 to around \$150.00 per short ton as of September 2008. As of October 2010, the price per short ton had declined to \$71.25.

UK Coal, which employs about 2,700 people, reported losses of £124.6 million in 2010, following losses of £129.1 million in 2009 and £15.6m in 2008. In 2007, UK Coal reported profits of £69m.

An almost eight-fold increase has taken place in the deaths of miners in British coal mines during this economically fraught period. The legal judgment on UK Coal makes clear that these deaths are expected to be only the first of many such casualties.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BEAM BUILDING

The creation of a strong, inflexible beam by bolting or otherwise fastening together several weaker layers. In coal mining this is the intended basis for roof bolting.

-Ed