



Mining Accident News No.1202

20 to 31 January 2012

In this issue:

USA: W.Va. man dies from injuries in accident at mine in Va., 1st US coal mining death of year	
Canada: More safety inspectors to monitor B.C. mines	1
This week in mining accident history	2
Qld: Obesity weighing down mine industry	3
Qld: Miner hurt in underground mishap	4
Months after Mining Deaths, Kentucky Gov. Cuts Funding For Mine Safety	4
Canada: Vale releases fatal mining accident investigation results	5
Quote of the week	6
USA: Kentucky mine idled in December inspection blitz.....	6
S.Africa: Fatality at Harmony's Doornkop mine	7
NSW: New technology to stamp out fatigue related mine accidents	8
USA: Meningitis sparks scare at Pennsylvania mine	8
Zambia: Dead miner's family gets K50m compensation.....	9
USA: Ex-foreman who faked safety records sues Patriot	9
UK: How 1896 Tylorstown pit disaster prompted safety change	10
S. Africa: Worker killed at Harmony mine.....	12
Man killed in accident at Vale mine in Ontario	12
WA: Mines dept to probe Pilbara mishap	13
NZ: Pike River families 'gutted' as delays mean mine experts leave.....	13
Canada: 'Too early' to know why miner was killed, Vale says	14
NZ: Pike River Coal accused back in court	15
Ukraine: Four miners trapped after rock fall in mine in Donetsk region	15
USA: Tomblin's coal mine safety bill introduced	16
Canada: Sudbury police release name of man killed in accident at Vale's Coleman Mine	17
Mining dictionary	17

Friday 20 January 2012

USA: W.Va. man dies from injuries in accident at mine in Va., 1st US coal mining death of year

Extract from The Republic, Columbus, Indiana, USA

OAKWOOD, Va. — A West Virginia man has died from injuries suffered in an accident at a CONSOL Energy coal mine in southwest Virginia.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration says it's the nation's first coal mining fatality of the year.

Virginia Department of Mines Minerals and Energy spokesman Mike Abbott tells media outlets that 44-year-old Joe Saunders of Princeton, W.Va., died Wednesday at a hospital in Bristol, Tenn.

Abbott says Saunders and another miner were injured Jan. 11 while working at CONSOL's Buchanan No. 1 mine near Oakwood in Buchanan County. Saunders was hit in the head by a piece of a high-pressure water line valve that blew off and broke.

The other miner suffered minor injuries.

Abbott says the accident is being investigated by the state agency and MSHA.

Saturday 21 January 2012

Canada: More safety inspectors to monitor B.C. mines

Extract from The Vancouver Sun, Ca

Growth in industry prompts province to hire 10 more auditors to curb injuries on the job

The British Columbia government plans to hire 10 new mine inspectors over a 12-month period - more than a 25-per-cent increase - to keep

pace with increased mining activity and help ensure work-site safety.

Al Hoffman, the province's chief inspector of mines, said in an interview from Victoria that four new inspectors have been hired within the past six months. The goal is to hire another six over the next six months consistent with increased mining activity, including new mines and expansion of existing mines.

"The challenge we have is that the mining industry is, in general, booming," Hoffman said. "We're competing with industry to get the same skill sets."

If successful in filling the six latest postings, that would bring the total complement of B.C. mine inspectors to 46. Inspectors are involved in a range of duties, from permitting of mining exploration to conducting health and safety inspections of operating mines. WorkSafeBC reports that the province wide injury accident rate was 2.27 per 100 workers in 2010, the last year for which such statistics are available.

The mining sector averages two injuries per 100, much better than the average of four in forestry and general construction, five in heavy construction, and eight in warehousing.

"We're very proud of that record," Hoffman said. "We like to think it's a collaborative effort of the mining industry, workers, unions, and us. High injury rates and fatalities are morally unacceptable. There's also a realization that safe mines are efficient mines."

However, mining inspection reports that were obtained by The Vancouver Sun through freedom of information requests show that a broad range of safety-related issues still linger.

Records tell of an excavator crashing into an overhead power line, workers at risk from hydrogen sulphide gas, a truck with a faulty exhaust pipe posing a threat of explosion, and loaded haul trucks at risk of backing over embankments.

Richard Boyce, who is president of local 7619 of the United Steelworkers, which represents workers at Highland Valley near Logan Lake, said that the union has been a major player at the mine over the past four decades and that it takes time for new mines to develop a strong safety culture.

"We stick our nose into just about everything that goes on at the mine when it comes to health and safety," Boyce said. "But at the same time the system has evolved. Management is very involved, as well, to ensure people go home safe."

Mining had 234 disability claims in 2011, up from 189 in 2010 and 181 in 2009.

There have been six mining deaths in B.C. over the past three years, one related to a bulldozer backing over an embankment and the rest linked to past exposure to asbestos, dust or fumes.

The Ministry of Energy and Mines reports there are seven operating metal mines and 10 operating coal mines in B.C. - with another four mines in the construction phase - in addition to numerous sand and gravel and quarry operations. Mines typically receive multiple inspections on an annual basis in addition to periodic audits.

This week in mining accident history

23 January 1907

**Colorado Fuel & Iron Company's Coal mine
Primero, Colorado, USA
Underground coal mine
20 killed by explosion**

TWENTY LIVES GO OUT IN A MINE EXPLOSION OVER IN COLORADO

Trinidad, Colo., Jan 23 --Twenty miners, according to the authentic information available his evening, lost their lives as a result of an explosion which occurred at three o'clock this

morning in the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company's Coal mine near Primero, twenty miles west of this city.

Twenty coffins have been ordered by the company from a local undertaking establishment.

Two of the dead are Frank Hobat, miner, and R. J. Lumbey, fire boss. The names of the other men killed have not been learned, as the shift boss, who had charge of the men who went into the mine last night, is missing. All the men except Lumley were foreigners, most of them being Italians.

The explosion stopped the air fan, which was not repaired until late today, and there is little chance that any of the men in the mine at the time of the explosion are still alive.

District Superintendent Robert O'Neil is personally directing the work of rescue. Volunteers from adjacent mines are assisting. Rescuers have been divided into two hour shifts and work will be kept up continuously until the entire mine is explored.

During the entire day excitement ran high and relatives of the entombed miners stood waiting at the entrance to the mine for a sight of any of the victims that might be brought to the surface.

The damage to the mine cannot be learned tonight.

An attempt is being made to force air into the mine in the hope that some of the entombed men may be alive, and thus prevent their suffocating.

Late advices are that the mine is badly wrecked. The rescue party has penetrated three hundred feet and recovered four bodies, the names not being given.

Daily Nevada State Journal, Reno, NV 24 Jan 1907

Trinidad, Colo., January 24. --- Heroically at work the rescuing party has so far succeeded in

recovering but four bodies from the Primero mine where the explosion occurred yesterday morning.

Following is a list of dead whose bodies have been recovered:

ANGELO PEZITTI

FORTUNATO GRACAMATO

ENRICO STIFFLI

C. CASAGRANDA

The missing supposed to be dead in the mine are:

J. Reece Lumley, mine boss; Madisto Formali, Louie and Joseph Sipas, John Tokar, John Toth, John Toth Jr., M Omadono, Angelo Maddelena, Robert and John Fatur and Julius Randolph.

Reno Evening Gazette, Reno, NV 24 Jan 1907

Monday 23 January 2012

Qld: Obesity weighing down mine industry

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Health experts say Queensland's population is getting fatter due in part to the mining industry.

Figures from Diabetes Queensland show three-in-four employees in the mining sector are overweight or obese.

CEO Michelle Trute says 65 per cent of the state's adult population will be overweight or obese by 2020.

She says shift workers are often most vulnerable to putting on weight.

"Where you've got a high proportion of shift workers and where you've got a high proportion of workers who don't have a lot of opportunities throughout the day to move around and walk around - they're the sort of things that are going to increase the likelihood of being obese," she said.

Ms Trute says that helps to explain why chronic disease is so common in the Mount Isa region, in the state's north-west.

She says programs have been launched at mine sites across the state to tackle the issue.

"We've been doing quite a bit of work with a lot of the mines here in Queensland," she said.

"Just out of Mackay, there's the McCarthur Coal Mine and we've been going in and speaking to the workers and educating the workers on healthy living and healthy lifestyle.

"They can just change little things everyday to make a difference."

Qld: Miner hurt in underground mishap

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

A mine worker is in a serious but stable condition after fracturing his arm at a central Queensland mine site.

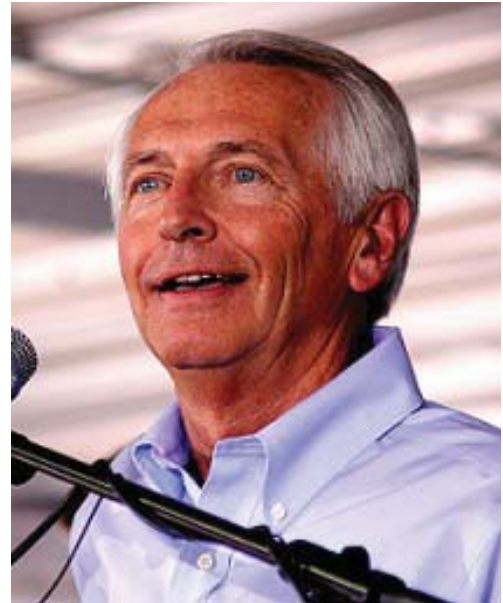
The 56 year old was airlifted to the Mackay Base Hospital after his left arm became caught in an underground ventilation door at the Grasree Mine, near Middlemount, about 2:00am (AEST).

In a statement, Anglo American Coal says it is treating the incident very seriously and is investigating its cause.

Months after Mining Deaths, Kentucky Gov. Cuts Funding For Mine Safety

Extract from thinkprogress.org/green

After two miners were killed at the Equality Boot Mine near Centertown, Kentucky in October, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear (D) issued a statement calling for a thorough investigation into the cause of the tragedy. "Mine safety is of paramount importance," Beshear said. "Investigative teams will begin work immediately to determine the cause of this accident and whether there are any steps that can be taken to ensure such an accident does not occur again."



Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear

Less than three months later, the "paramount importance" of mine safety seems to have disappeared. When Beshear unveiled his two-year budget proposal last week, the agency that oversees mine safety was slapped with a 4.2 percent budget cut, the Lexington Herald-Leader reported. Though the cut is smaller than those faced by other state agencies, the budget for the mine permitting agency, tasked with approving new mining sites (including those used for mountaintop removal), went untouched.

Mine safety, and the enforcement of mine safety regulations, has repeatedly taken a backseat to expanded mining under Beshear, despite repeated accidents in Kentucky mines that had been cited for safety violations. The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) cited Armstrong Coal, the operator of the Equality Boot Mine, with 15 safety violations between its 2010 opening and the October deaths. In 16 months preceding a deadly accident at the Dotiki Mine in Providence, Kentucky, MSHA issued 840 safety violations to its operator, Alliance Resource Partners.

Days after the Dotiki Mine disaster, Beshear appeared at the opening of another Alliance-owned mine and made no mention of mine safety. In 2011, Beshear appointed one of Alliance's top safety officials to the Kentucky

Mining Board, even though at least nine miners have died at Alliance-owned mines since 2005.

During his 2011 re-election campaign, Beshear took more than half a million dollars in campaign contributions from the coal industry, begging the question ThinkProgress has asked of his state's elected officials before: Is Beshear putting the interests of his Big Coal campaign contributors ahead of actual human lives?

Tuesday 24 January 2012

Canada: Vale releases fatal mining accident investigation results

Extract from Northern Life.ca

Company hopes to prevent similar incidents from occurring again

When a tragedy occurs, there's a "natural inclination to want to know who or what is to blame," Kelly Strong, Vale's vice-president of North Atlantic mining and milling operations, said.

But when it comes to the June 8, 2011 deaths of Vale miners Jason Chenier, 35, and Jordan Fram, 26, at Stobie Mine, it's not that simple, he said.

The miners were killed after about 350 tons of muck, or ore, unexpectedly entered the 3,000 foot level ore pass drift where they were working at around 9:45 p.m. that evening.

"There is no one definite answer to that question," Strong said.

"There appears to be a number of contributing factors to the run of muck. A plan of action, including more than 30 recommendations, has been compiled to put control measures in place to control these potential causes, and they are currently being implemented.

"Our primary focus is now putting measures in place to prevent a similar incident from ever occurring."

Strong briefed the media Jan. 24 about the results of the company's investigation into the miners' deaths. He said the results of the investigation have already been shared with the victims' families, and the company is in the process of sharing it with Vale workers.

Everybody at Stobie Mine was "following procedures and doing what they were supposed to do" in the days and hours leading up to the incident, he said.

One of the factors which led to the accident was a process called "remnant mining," where some mining had been done in an old mine shaft above where the miners were working, he said. This shaft was filled with "backfill," or a sandy tailings material.

"You don't want some of that material mixed in with the ore as a dilutant to the ore," Strong said. "But it does occur from time to time."

Wet, sandy material was found in the muck which killed the miners, which led investigators to believe some of the backfill material had mixed in with the muck.



Kelly Strong, Vale's vice-president of North Atlantic mining and milling operations, spoke to reporters Jan. 24 about the company's investigation into the deaths of two miners at its Stobie Mine last summer. Photo by Heidi Ulrichsen.

There was also some issues with "water management," with some plugged drain holes, leading the muck to be wet.

This led to one of two scenarios, Strong said.

One scenario is that "there was a buildup of wet, fine sandy muck above the crash gate on the 3,000 level, which collapsed and drove its way

down the ore pass, overtaking the two individuals.”

The other scenario is that “there was a hangup of wet, fine sandy muck above coarser material, which unexpectedly let go.”

In either scenario, it is clear that the gate at the 3,000 foot level was open, and that the ore pass was full below the 3,000 foot level, which caused the deflection upwards of the muck into the drift where Chenier and Fram were located, according to information provided by Vale.

Other factors which led to the accident include practices and procedures, roles and responsibilities for various tasks underground and training and awareness, according to Strong.

The 30 recommendations being put forward by Vale following the investigation address such things as improved practices around water management, ore mixing, ore pass management, roles and responsibilities, training and awareness, hazard recognition and risk assessment and auditing to validate the effectiveness of controls.

Strong said the company has already implemented some of these recommendations. When asked how the Chenier and Fram families are reacting to the results of the investigation, Strong said it would be inappropriate for him to comment out of respect for their privacy.

Steelworkers Local 6500, the union which represents Vale miners, and the Ministry of Labour are also conducting their own, separate investigations into the incident. Neither organization has released their reports yet.

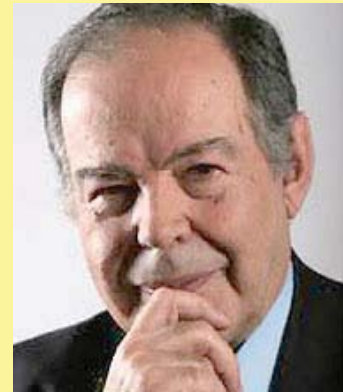
Vale is committed to “learning from these investigations, and to considering other recommendations into our action plan that may surface as a result of those findings,” according to information provided by the company.

Ministry of Labour spokesperson Matt Blajer said the ministry's investigation is completely different from Vale's.

“Our investigation is to see what happened, and if the Occupational Health and Safety Act was complied with,” he said. “It's a much more detailed process. There's nothing new to report from our end.”

Local 6500 president Rick Bertrand was not immediately available for comment on the issue.

Quote of the week



“Humour is by far the most significant activity of the human brain.”

Edward De Bono
Born 1933 Malta,
originator of term 'lateral thinking'

Thursday 26 January 2012

USA: Kentucky mine idled in December inspection blitz

THE US Mine Safety and Health Administration released the results of its December impact inspections Monday, revealing that it closed a Kentucky underground operation after alarming conditions and hazards resulted in more than 30 citations and a dozen orders.

Overall, the agency completed inspections of 10 coal mines and three metal/nonmetal operations during the month of December, and issued a total of 321 citations and orders.

There were 174 citations and 19 orders issued in coal, and 112 citations and 16 orders in metal/nonmetal.

In November, federal inspectors issued 315 citations, orders and safeguards at 10 coal

operations and six metal/nonmetal complexes, with 200 citations, 50 orders and one safeguard in coal and 62 citations and two orders in metal/nonmetal.

One of MSHA's most recent impact inspections was conducted in Floyd County, Kentucky, with highly concerning results.

Federal officials arrived at Coal Creek Mining's No. 2 operation on the night shift between December 8 and December 9. The officials issued 32 citations and 12 orders and subsequently shut down the mine.

One imminent danger order was given to the operator when inspectors discovered a coal pile five feet high and 10 feet in diameter on fire at the surface, about 23 feet from an explosives storage magazine.

The storage magazine, which was loaded with two cases of explosives, had not been protected against authorized entry. In fact, a key was lying on top of the magazine that was clearly marked for its use.

MSHA also found a five-gallon oil bucket with burning coal near the mine's intake portals. The mine's other violations included loosed coal accumulations at depths of up to 30 inches under conveyor belts and drives and near ignition sources; inadequate rock dusting float coal dust accumulation on top of previously rock-dusted surfaces in the belt entry and neighboring crosscuts; and float coal dust on the mine floor, roof, ribs, conveyor belt structure and mining equipment.

"An unwarrantable failure order was issued for failing to follow the approved ventilation plan that required the operator to keep roadways in the mine damp to suppress dust," MSHA said, noting that a fine dust between two and four inches deep was found along the entire roadway entry as well as section section-haulage entries.

"More unwarrantable failure orders were issued for inadequate workplace hazard examinations, including on-shift conveyor belt examinations, weekly return air course examinations and

weekly electrical equipment examinations. Following the December impact inspection, the operator was issued two 104(b) orders for failing to completely correct and abate hazards within the required time frame."

MSHA did not indicate Wednesday if the mine is still idled.

"It is troubling that, after all this time, MSHA inspectors continue to find such serious hazards and some mine operators allow such conditions to exist," assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health Joseph Main said.

"We will continue to use all the enforcement tools at our disposal to combat noncompliance."

The agency's special impact inspections began in force in April 2010 following the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine where 29 workers were killed.

The push involved mines that merit increased attention and enforcement by the agency due to a poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns, including high numbers of violations or closure orders; indications of operator tactics, such as advance notification of inspections that prevent inspectors from observing violations; frequent hazard complaints or hotline calls; plan compliance issues; inadequate workplace examinations; a high number of accidents, injuries or illnesses; fatalities; and adverse conditions such as increased methane liberation, faulty roof conditions and inadequate ventilation.

Since April 2010, MSHA has conducted 387 impact inspections, which have resulted in 6931 citations, 701 orders and 23 safeguards.

S.Africa: Fatality at Harmony's Doornkop mine

Extract from Bussiness Report, South Africa

An employee of gold mining company Harmony (HAR) was died on Wednesday following an accident at shaft bottom at the Doornkop mine near Randfontein.

"Operations have been stopped until such time as all investigations into the accident have been completed," the company added on Thursday.

Harmony's chief executive, Graham Briggs, and his management team expressed their sincere condolences to the family of the deceased and those affected by the incident.



CEO of Harmony Gold Graham Briggs.

Friday 27 January 2012

NSW: New technology to stamp out fatigue related mine accidents

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Heavy vehicles at Hunter mine sites could soon be equipped with a system that monitors a driver's vital signs and alerts them when they are getting drowsy or fatigued.

Newcastle communications company Gencom is partnering with US firm Exmoveve to develop a biometric system that will be installed in the steering wheel and under the driver's seat.

Business development manager John Park says the aim is to prevent fatigue-related accidents.

"You can do your heart rates, breathing rates, skin temperature etc and from that you can tell how the individual is in terms of how they're feeling.

"Even whether they're happy, sad, agitated, depressed, as well as what we're mainly interested in is drowsiness.

"Obviously drowsiness is a major cause of accident around the world."



Photo: The new technology which is installed in the steering wheel and under the driver's seat detects when the driver is drowsy or fatigued. (ABC TV News - file image)

Mr Park says it is hoped a trial can be conducted at a Hunter mine site soon.

"That's obviously where we want to start with, that's the easiest one for us to promote," he said.

"The intention is over the next three to six months to get a pilot going with one of the mines at least.

"What we are trying to do is make it relevant to the mining sector by integrating it into the new digital two way radio systems."

USA: Meningitis sparks scare at Pennsylvania mine

Extract from International Longwall News

A CONSOL Energy longwall operation is now on alert after a worker at its Bailey mine died on Tuesday afternoon from a rare form of meningitis.

Company spokesperson Lynn Seay confirmed to *ILN* on Thursday that the male worker, whose name is not being released at the request of his family, fell ill while at work at the Bailey operation in Greene County on Monday and went home with flu-like symptoms.

"He sought medical attention Tuesday afternoon and died shortly after," she said.

"Medical professionals and the Pennsylvania Health Department have determined the cause to be neisseria meningitides."

Seay added that the extremely rare disease was contracted only via saliva transfer.

The company has alerted all of its personnel and has a doctor onsite at the mine to explain the disease and symptoms to workers.

It is also encouraging all employees to seek medical attention if they desire.

"Consol Energy's thoughts and prayers go out to the family of our deceased employee during this difficult time," Seay said, adding that it is working closely with health department officials to determine how the employee contracted the disease.

The US Mine Safety and Health Administration did not release public statement to *ILN* Thursday afternoon.

Zambia: Dead miner's family gets K50m compensation

Extract from Times of Zambia

COLLUM Coal Mine in Sinazongwe district has paid compensation of K50 million to the family of a deceased miner Gibson Siachvewenya who died in a mine accident on January 18, 2012.

The mine also provided a coffin to the family to use for the burial of the accident victim.

This is according to a report submitted to Southern Province Minister Miles Sampa dated January 22, 2012 also made available to Times of Zambia in Livingstone.

The mine, which is owned by Chinese, stated in its report that the two parties also made and signed a compensation agreement.

Management at the mine assured the Government that the mine management would look at the welfare of the other miners that had been injured in accordance with the laws of Zambia.

A miner Maiya Wispow, who was injured during the same accident, is currently in Maamba hospital while others have been discharged.

The mine said it had taken steps after the accident that happened on shaft three and has since reduced the productive task each team has to undertake from 75 tramcars to 70 tramcars.

"We apologise to the miners' families and stopped production for seven days from January 18, after the accident happened," the report says.

Last week, Mr Sampa gave Collum Coal Mine a 48-hour ultimatum to give him a report on the mine accident and warned that the Government would revoke its mining licence if the mine continued to violate safety standards.

USA: Ex-foreman who faked safety records sues Patriot

Extract from Associated Press, USA

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — An ex-mine foreman who admitted faking safety inspection reports is suing Patriot Coal Corp. and the Federal No. 2 mine bosses who he claims pressured him to falsify data.

John Renner is awaiting sentencing on federal charges. He pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Clarksburg in March 2010, but prosecutors have repeatedly delayed his sentencing, citing his cooperation in an investigation of the mine.

The Dominion Post (<http://bit.ly/x50TZY>) says Renner sued St. Louis-based Patriot, subsidiary Eastern Associated Coal LLC, and several employees in Monongalia County Circuit Court last week, including his former supervisors and others identified only as John Doe.

The complaint says mine management pressured Renner to fake methane gas readings on sealed sections of the mine to avoid a shutdown that would have stopped coal production. The managers' conduct was "atrocious, utterly intolerable in a civilized community and so extreme and outrageous as to exceed all possible bounds of decency," the complaint charges.

Patriot spokeswoman Janine Orf didn't immediately return a message Friday.

Renner, 41, of Granville, faces as much as five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for making false statements and certifications under federal mine safety laws.

The charge stemmed from a Jan 24, 2010, inspection that Renner claimed to have made on a sealed area at the mine near Fairview. Though he recorded numbers for methane and oxygen levels, Renner later acknowledged he didn't do the inspection.

Federal regulations have required seal monitoring because of a January 2006 methane explosion in a sealed section of International Coal Group's Sago Mine. Twelve men were trapped for more than 40 hours by the blast and died of carbon monoxide poisoning. Only one survived.

The massive longwall operation at Federal No. 2 has more than 90 seals, but Renner told investigators only a handful routinely caused problems.

In a regulatory filing in 2010, the company acknowledged it was under investigation. It said federal investigators had demanded information about methane gas detectors used at the mine since July 2008.

The lawsuit says Renner, who was fired from the mine, has since struggled with unemployment and is seeking damages for lost wages and benefits, medical expenses and mental anguish.

Sunday 29 January 2012

UK: How 1896 Tylorstown pit disaster prompted safety change

Extract from BBC News, Wales

At their height there were at least 3,000 of them employed in coal mines across the UK, and despite weighing just 15 to 20g, worldwide it is

believed that they could have saved the lives of more than a million men.

That's why for a century the tiny yellow canary was the most indispensable member of any colliery's staff.

Whilst they were phased out in Britain by 1987, they are still kept as back-up to digital devices by the UK Mines Rescue Service, and remain a common sight in pits from Ukraine to China.

But even though they have spread their wings right around the globe, the inspiration for using canaries to detect dangerous gases underground started in Wales, after the Tylorstown disaster 116 years ago.

The genius behind the idea came from Prof John Scott Haldane, a medical researcher and mining engineer of Scottish, rather than Welsh descent.

His biographer Prof Martin Goodman said: "Professor Haldane was truly a giant of his age, who could only really have existed in a Victorian era before ethics and health and safety."

Prof Goodman said virtually everything we know about the workings of lungs came from Prof Haldane, who became very personally involved in the research.

Throughout the late 19th Century it was believed that most miners trapped in an explosion died from the force of the blast itself.

Prof Haldane stood virtually alone in his belief that suffocation was a far greater killer.

So from late 1895 the professor was on high alert, bags packed at Oxford University, waiting for the opportunity to test his theory at the next underground disaster.

It came soon enough, on the morning of 27 January 1896, when rock blasting at Tylorstown No 8 Pit in Rhondda Fach ignited a methane explosion so powerful that it blew the winding gear off the top of the shaft.

Palls of poisonous gases and lightning storms hampered the rescue attempts, so that it was

well into Tuesday by the time the final death toll of 57 men and 80 pit ponies had been arrived at.

"After the ear-splitting blast came the silence, despair and heartache in the early morning rain," said Prof Goodman.

"Rumours spread like wildfire throughout the valley communities that a terrible disaster had occurred at Tylorstown."

David Owen, archivist and author on the Rhondda coalfield, said: "Wild claims were made which put the numbers of men trapped or buried as high as 700, and one early newspaper report did little to calm the fears of the close-knit community.

"Although the explosion occurred in No 8 Pit, the worst consequences were experienced at No 7 Pit. The force of the explosion brought down heavy falls of roof and sides, cutting off all expectation of life and making recovery of the casualties a very time consuming operation."

It was against this backdrop that Prof Haldane arrived in Tylorstown, and immediately insisted on going underground to see the victims before they were moved, no matter the danger.

He was perplexed to discover four men dead in a chamber, with a lit oil lamp still burning between them.

This was significant because flames require at least an 18% concentration of atmospheric oxygen to burn, whereas humans can survive with as little as 10%.

As Prof Goodman explains, this meant Prof Haldane recognised immediately that his theory of suffocation was entirely wrong.

"Prof Haldane wasn't interested in finding proof for his theories and he wasn't afraid of admitting he was wrong if it helped him get to the truth," he said.

"It clearly wasn't the blast which had killed the miners - there wasn't a mark on them. So if it wasn't the absence of oxygen, then he

concluded that it must be the presence of something else.

"He and a local doctor conducted post mortems on the victims - not a common procedure at the time - and finally came up with an answer to why they all looked so rosy and healthy."

Life and death

In fact what Prof Haldane had discovered was that the pink tinge which had been traditionally explained away as bruising or burns, was in fact hemoglobin in the blood binding with carbon monoxide rather than oxygen.

In effect the men had suffocated, though not through a lack of oxygen.

His next few months would be spent locked in a gas-filled laboratory, testing the effects of carbon monoxide on himself and a series of smaller animals.

His children were told to watch through the windows, with orders only to open the doors if either Prof Haldane or one of the animals collapsed.

He concluded that whilst both mice and canaries were 20 times more susceptible to the gas than humans, canaries would give miners the best advance warning, as they stopped singing and would fall off their perch.

It started a 100-year tradition of miners treating their canaries like pets, talking and whistling to them, as their songs may one day prove the difference between life and death.

But canaries weren't the only life-saving finding in Prof Haldane's Tylorstown report.

"He discovered that whilst the natural reaction was to run away from explosions, the best chance of survival came from staying as low as possible, and crawling very slowly so that the heart and breathing rate stay very steady," said Prof Goodman.

And the miners were not the only ones to benefit from Prof Haldane's findings.

Whilst many thought the use of canaries in mines to be cruel, mistakenly believing that the bird had to die in order to provide an early warning, Prof Haldane was extremely concerned for the welfare of the animals on whom he experimented.

"In some ways you could say that he was one of the first anti-vivisectionists, as he would rarely, if ever, do something to an animal which he wasn't prepared to do to himself," said Prof Goodman.

"Probably the ones who suffered the most in his experiments were his children. His daughter Naomi Mitchison, who became a very successful novelist, wrote of how her friends ran away when she told them that her father had invited them all for tea because he wanted their blood!"

Monday 30 January 2012

S. Africa: Worker killed at Harmony mine

Extract from www.fin24.com

Johannesburg - A miner was killed at Harmony Gold Mining Company West shaft next to the Bambanani mine in the Free State, the company said on Monday.

All operations had been stopped until investigations into the accident, which happened on Sunday, had been completed, the mine said.

"The accident occurred while scheduled maintenance was performed on the west shaft headgear to enable hoisting of ore from the planned Bambanani and Steyn 2 pillar extractions."

Harmony's CEO Graham Briggs expressed condolences to the miner's family on behalf of his management team.

The mine would not give any further details about the incident.

Last Friday, two miners were killed in a rock fall at the Modikwa platinum mine in Burgersfort, Limpopo.

National Union of Mineworkers' (Num) spokesman Lesiba Seshoka said at the weekend it was disappointing that deaths were being recorded so early into the year.

"We are really disappointed that in January we are seeing fatalities [in mines] rising to over ten so far this year. Last year the deaths reached just beyond 120," he said.

Man killed in accident at Vale mine in Ontario

Extract from CTV.ca

A 47-year-old man was killed in an accident Sunday afternoon at a mine northwest of Sudbury, Ont.

The man was working underground on the 4,215-foot level of Vale's Coleman Mine in Levack when material from a development heading was displaced, the company said in a release.

The 16-year veteran of the company was brought to the surface where he was pronounced dead.

"We are saddened and devastated by the loss of this employee," said Kelly Strong, a spokesperson for the company. "Our deepest sympathies and prayers go out to the employee's family, and everyone who knew and worked with him. Our efforts are now focused on supporting the family and our employees at the mine site, and on understanding exactly what occurred."

The name of the employee was not immediately released.

The company said the accident is being investigated by the Greater Sudbury Police Services, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, and representatives of Vale and the United Steelworkers Local 6500. It has temporarily suspended operations at all of its mines in Sudbury.

This is the second fatal incident in less than a year at one of the company's mines in the area. Two men were killed at its Stobie Mine in June.

WA: Mines dept to probe Pilbara mishap

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Department of Mines and Petroleum will investigate what caused an accident at a Pilbara mine site earlier this month, saying the accident could have resulted in a death.

A 44-year-old man suffered lacerations and hairline fractures while working at BHP's Mount Whaleback mine, located near Newman.

He was undertaking maintenance work on a conveyor belt at the time.

The department has confirmed it will be investigating what caused the accident, saying the case was being taken "very seriously".

NZ: Pike River families 'gutted' as delays mean mine experts leave

Extract from nzherald.co.nz

Families of the 29 men killed in the Pike River blasts say they are gutted that Australian experts brought in to help retrieve the bodies have "packed their bags and gone" because the mine manager has not done a full-risk assessment.

Experts brought in to stabilise the mine are understood to have returned to Australia after managers failed to provide a full-risk assessment of the next step in the re-entry process, which would involve pouring a rapidly expanding sealant down a 100m borehole to seal the main tunnel.

In a letter to Pike River Coal on Friday, the Department of Labour said a full assessment needed to be presented before any further work on the sealing project could go ahead.

Acting chief inspector of mines Gavin Taylor said the department had not put a stop on work at the mine.

"We have simply reminded the mine manager of his responsibilities to provide a full-risk assessment of the project before it starts - something he should have done some time ago," he said.

A spokesman for the Pike River victims' families, Bernie Monk, said the Australian experts who had been working at the mine had already "packed their bags and gone home".

"It's just gut-wrenching. It's just continuously a blow after blow that we're getting, but nobody seems to be discussing things with us."

Meanwhile, Greymouth's mayor Tony Kokshoorn has called on the former Pike River Coal boss to rethink his "extremely insensitive" decision to set up a mining consultancy business which includes advising on mine safety.

Peter Whittall was the chief executive of Pike River Coal when explosions killed 29 men in November 2010.

The Department of Labour has laid 12 charges against him alleging he failed to take all practical steps to ensure the safety of company workers.

Charges have also been laid against Pike River Coal and VLI Drilling Pty.

Mr Whittall, who finished in his role as chief executive last November, denies the charges against him. He has now founded and registered Peter Whittall and Associates.

Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn said Mr Whittall's decision to set up the company was "extremely insensitive at this stage".

"There was disaster under his watch. I just don't think Peter's making the right call here," he said.

"He needs to think about this hard and he's only digging a bigger hole for himself, quite frankly."

Canada: 'Too early' to know why miner was killed, Vale says

Extract from Northern Life.ca

Vale isn't sure what caused rock to become displaced from the face of a development drift at the 4,215-foot level of its Coleman Mine, killing a 47-year-old miner during the early afternoon of Jan. 29.



An underground mining accident claimed the life of a 47-year-old Vale miner Jan. 29. The company still isn't sure what caused the incident. File photo

"At this time, it's too early to understand what the mechanism of failure was," Kelly Strong, the company's North Atlantic operations vice-president of mining and milling and general manager of Ontario operations, said.

One of the possible ways the rock could have become displaced is seismic activity, he said.

The miner, whose name has not yet been released, was working alone in the drift, using a piece of equipment called an "Anfo loader" to load explosives into the face of the rock.

The fact that he was loading explosives at the time of the accident had nothing to do with his death, Strong said.

Vale would like to conduct a joint investigation alongside Steelworkers Local 6500, the union which represents the company's miners, he said.

"That's certainly our hope and intention," Strong said. "I've got a meeting later today to start holding those discussions."

The two parties conducted separate investigations into the June 2011 deaths of 26-

year-old Jordan Fram and 35-year-old Jason Chenier at Stobie Mine because they were unable to agree about how it should be conducted.

The Ministry of Labour and Greater Sudbury Police are also conducting investigations into the incident. Both ministry and police representatives are currently at the scene of the accident, which has been "frozen" by the ministry.

All operations at the company's Sudbury mines has been suspended until further notice, although employees are still being paid. In light of the incident, Strong said the company will put in place an action plan to make sure its employees are safe before they return to work.

"What I want to make clear is we run our operations seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and largely without any incident," he said.

"Our mines are known as being some of the safest in the country. Today, we're going through a very tragic incident. That's really why we've decided to take this step back, or pause, and temporarily shut the mines down, and really see what we need to do immediately before we start bringing people back to work."

Just last week, Vale released the results of their investigation into Fram and Chenier's deaths. Strong said the recommendations released as part of that investigation don't really apply to the latest death.

"Those two incidents are very different," he said. "They're not related as far as the activities are concerned."

Strong said the man killed in the Jan. 29 incident had 16 years of experience with the company. He offered his condolences to the man's family and friends.

"I can tell you the employee was skilled and experienced and highly respected by his fellow employees," he said. "His loss will be felt deeply at Coleman Mine, across our other mines and in all of our operations."

The company's critical stress management team is offering support to the man's family, friends and coworkers, Strong said.

Tuesday 31 January 2012

NZ: Pike River Coal accused back in court

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

Lawyers for former Pike River Coal head Peter Whittall are considering applying to have some of the charges against him dropped because of the timeframe in which they were laid.

Whittall is one of three parties facing Department of Labour charges relating to the deaths of 29 men in the Pike River Mine disaster.

They are expected to plea at their next court appearance, in Greymouth in March.

Lawyers for Whittall, Pike River Coal Ltd (in receivership) and Australian company VLI Drilling appeared in Greymouth District Court this morning for a procedural hearing.

There was a strong media presence but none of the defendants appeared.

Whittall's lawyer Paul Radich asked that consideration be given to moving his trial to Wellington, as Whittall now lived there.

The parties face a total of 26 charges which are varied. However, two of them specify the youngest victim, 17-year-old Joseph Ray Dunbar.

VLI Drilling Pty Ltd is charged with failing to ensure the safety of Mr Dunbar, while Pike River Coal Ltd is also charged in connection with his death, specifically failing to record and audit the conditions of the ventilation control devices.

The other charges vary but some relate to a lack of explosion mitigation, lack of ventilation and/or methane management, and a failure to delay an increase in the width of a coal extraction panel until the geology was properly investigated.

VLI faces three charges and Pike River Coal Ltd nine. Whittall faces four charges alone, and eight jointly with his former employer.

Department of Labour lawyer Brent Stanaway told the court that today's hearing was simply a callover remand.

"This will enable the (Department of Labour) to make full disclosure to all parties - and that disclosure will be substantial."

Judge Emma Smith said she was satisfied there had been progress with the case, which she adjourned until March, noting that "pleas are expected".

Outside the court, a second lawyer for Whittall, Stacey Shortall, said he would be fully defending all charges.

His legal team was working hard on the case and if they believed it necessary they would make an application for some of the charges to be dropped because of the timeframe in which they were laid.

"We are looking into this extensively and will make an application at the appropriate time."

Commenting on the controversy over his new mining consultancy business, she said he had only registered a company.

"Mr Whittall is one of a number of senior management people from Pike River who no longer works for Pike River - others are working elsewhere, Mr Whittall is unemployed and somewhere along the line he needed to look for employment - he has a family to support."

He was sorry if his registration of the company offended anyone - "it was unintentional".

Ukraine: Four miners trapped after rock fall in mine in Donetsk region

Extract from Kyiv Post

Four coal miners have been trapped at the Rumiantseva mine, run by the state enterprise Artemvuhillia (Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast).

As a result of a rock fall at a depth of 970-1,090 meters at 09.30 on Tuesday, four miners were trapped, the Trade Union of Coal Industry Workers of Ukraine reported.

A rescue operation is underway. As of 11.30, the rescuers had established sound communication with the trapped miners, the trade unions said.

At the time of the collapse, eleven miners were in the affected area, seven miners were brought to the surface safe.

The operation of the mine has been suspended.

USA: Tomblin's coal mine safety bill introduced

Extract from Beckley Register-Herald

CHARLESTON — Tipping off an underground crew of an inspector's arrival on coal mine property becomes a felony with a prison term of up to five years in Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin's proposed comprehensive safety bill.

Offered Monday, the 54-page document also calls for pre-employment drug screens and demands quarterly checks of self-rescuers.

Tomblin made mine safety a major item in his State of the State address this month, citing the April 5, 2010, tragedy at a Raleigh County coal mine.

Twenty-nine miners perished in a massive explosion that shook the sprawling Upper Big Branch mine that day.

In the aftermath, the first criminal trial emanating from the worst mine accident in four decades centered on advance notice provided to inspectors. That was in federal court in Beckley, where the trial ended in the conviction of a former security chief.

Under the Tomblin proposal, anyone who gives advance notice of an inspector's visit, or conspires to provide one, could be fined up to \$15,000, or imprisoned for one to five years, or both.

"We have diligently worked to determine the causes of the Upper Big Branch disaster to make sure a disaster like that never happens again," Tomblin had told lawmakers in his Jan. 11 remarks.

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If there is "reasonable cause" to suspect substance abuse figures in a miner's impairment, an inspector must require the operator to test that individual.

Such testing also becomes mandatory if impairment has contributed to an injury or death at a mine.

Anyone failing to pass muster, or refusing to undergo the drug screen, would be suspended immediately, pending a hearing before an appeals board.

Late last year, a veteran mine foreman told The Register-Herald in an interview that drug abuse was common within the industry, and that upward of 70 percent of young people applying for mine jobs cannot pass a drug test.

Anyone seeking a job must be tested for amphetamines, cannabinoids, cocaine, opiates, phencyclidine, benzodiazepines, propoxyphene, methadone, barbiturates and synthetic narcotics.

"No workplace can tolerate a person impaired by drugs, particularly in our mines," Tomblin said in the State of the State, advising the Legislature he planned to install the same type of drug-testing programs in force in Kentucky and Virginia.

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Any time workers are asked to enter a portion of a mine not covered in the pre-shift check, a supplemental inspection must be made.

In such inspection, a fire boss or other certified person must make sure air is moving in the proper direction and test the oxygen for deficiency and methane.

Another portion of the Tomblin bill calls for increasing the incombustible content of mine dust from 65 percent to 80 percent.

In its exhaustive investigation of the Upper Big Branch explosion, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration said a massive buildup of mine dust was triggered by a small blast of methane gas. MSHA said the disaster at the mine, owned by the former Massey Energy, was entirely preventable.

Law requires anyone working underground to wear a self-rescuer and that refresher training courses be held once annually. Tomblin is asking lawmakers to make such updated training mandatory each quarter.

Another section says the operator or foreman must immediately notify local emergency organizations in case of an accident.

Canada: Sudbury police release name of man killed in accident at Vale's Coleman Mine

Extract from The Canadian Press

LEVACK, Ont. - Sudbury police have released the name of the miner who died in a workplace accident at Vale's Coleman Mine in Levack, Ont.

Stephen Perry, 47, was killed Sunday while he was working alone underground in a mining area tagged for new development.

The company says displaced or loose rock material was involved in the accident but investigations are being carried out to determine how Perry died.

This is the third fatality at Vale's Sudbury operations in less than a year. Two miners died last June at the Stobie Mine.

Vale has temporarily suspended operations at all five of its Sudbury-area mines.

It's not known how long the shutdown will last.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour has asked that the area and equipment where the accident happened not be disturbed and for Vale to

provide any documentation that could be helpful in the probe.

Ministry spokesman Matt Blajer says this includes training records, equipment maintenance records, crew lineups, blueprints for the development area and a list of the employees involved in recovering the victim.

Blajer says investigators will be looking at safety procedures, training, equipment maintenance and whether the Health and Safety Occupation Act and mining regulations were followed.

He couldn't say how long the ministry's investigation would take but they have one year to complete the report.

Sudbury police are involved only until criminal liability has been ruled out.

Vale and the United Steelworkers Union will also conduct investigations once the other two agencies have released the scene.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

BEARING

A surveying term used to designate direction. The bearing of a line is the acute horizontal angle between the meridian and the line. The meridian is an established line of reference. Azimuths are angles measured clockwise from any meridian.



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