



Mining Accident News No.1205

24 February to 5 March 2012

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Friday 24 February 2012

USA: WV mine officials release final UBB report

CATALOG of more than 200 safety violations led to a mine explosion which killed 29 men, according to the latest report into the Upper Big Branch disaster.

Defence mechanisms used to prevent explosions failed at the UBB mine in West Virginia, then owned by Massey Energy.

West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training's long-awaited final report into the blast followed a 20-month investigation, which included underground examinations, interviews and a review of thousands of documents.

WVOMHST's findings concur with those already released, including reports from the United Mine Workers of America and the US Mine Safety and Health Administration.

The state concluded a machine cutting through sandstone to reach the coal created the heat or spark that methane needed to ignite.

Broken water sprayers then failed to stop the fireball from turning into a much more powerful explosion which was fuelled by coal dust.

Two possible sources of ignition were listed as the cause of the explosion which ripped through the mine on April 5, 2010.

One source of ignition was a sandstone roof rock falling behind the longwall shields ignited gas by rock-on-rock impact or rock-on-steel impact.

However, WVOMHST found the most likely cause of ignition happened on the longwall as the shearer was cutting sandstone roof, igniting gas by steel-on-rock impact along the shearer bits, producing hot smears as it cut.

NOTE: Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of the NSW Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services
Issue 5 of 2012

An accumulation of methane which was ignited by the longwall shearer was “not detected by the required mine examinations or by the required machine-mounted methane monitors,” the report said.

The methane explosion quickly transmitted into a coal dust blast which damaged ventilation controls, conveyor belts and electrical systems.

The report, which was released on Thursday, found the amount of rock dust being maintained on mine surfaces at the time was insufficient to stop a coal dust explosion.

“The region where the dust explosion started does not appear to have had rock dust periodically applied over the fine coal dust,” the report said.

“Periodic applications of rock dust over accumulating fine coal dust are necessary to render such dust harmless.”

One of the most “disturbing facts” yielded by the state’s findings was the #21 Tailgate side of the longwall was never rock dusted after the longwall started production in September 2009.

Approximately 5400ft of the 6700ft-long panel had been mined “without any record of rock dust being applied.”

The report said safety inspection logs had been signed to say the company was aware coal dust accumulation had resulted in the need for rock dusting, but there was no evidence of the issue being addressed.

WVOMHST’s investigation also determined log books were severely neglected.

“Obvious problems observed while reviewing the pre-shift and on-shift books was the lack of clarity and full disclosure of findings,” the report said.

“Extreme brevity of information was used on a daily basis in these records.”

The report said the lines of defence used to prevent an explosion, including adequate ventilation, detection of explosive gases,

removal of ignition sources and clean-up of fine coal dust accumulations and rock dusting all failed.

WVOMHST recommended additional defences need to be implemented to prevent propagation of a methane explosion into a coal dust explosion.

“Research is needed to demonstrate the practical application of water barriers, rock rubble barriers and other explosion mitigation strategies as supplemental protection, with generalized rock dusting, to prevent explosion propagations,” it said.

During the course of the investigation into the blast, the WVOMHST issued 253 violations.

The report stressed the need for justice to be done for the miners who lost their lives.

“Individuals involved in the day to day decision making at the mine must be held accountable regardless of their title,” the report said.

The report comes a day after federal prosecutors charged Upper Big Branch mine former superintendent Gary May with felony conspiracy.

He was charged with conspiring to impede the efforts of federal investigators by using code words to provide pre-notification of the presence of inspectors on mine property, as well as to conceal safety and health violations and falsify examination record books.

If convicted, he faces up to five years imprisonment.

Canada: Labrador mining firm charged after death

Extract from metro news, The Canadian Press

WABUSH, N.L. – Rio Tinto’s Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC), the country’s biggest producer of the steel-making ingredient, has been charged with five violations of the province’s Occupational Health and Safety Act after a fatal industrial accident at the company’s mine in western Labrador.

The Newfoundland and Labrador government says the charges follow an investigation by its Occupational Health and Safety Branch.

On April 19, 2011, two workers fell about seven metres from a platform near chains used to control the speed of ore flowing from the plant's crusher to rail cars.

One man was injured and his 38-year-old colleague was later pronounced dead in hospital.

The five charges relate to the company's alleged failure to ensure that adequate fall protection was in place, the equipment was safe and staff were properly trained and aware of potential hazards.

Canada: Mine argues charges in fatal tunnel collapse too vague

Extract from cbc news, Canada

Yukon safety inspectors will find out next week if the companies involved in a fatal mining accident in 2010 will get their day in court.

Procon Mining and Yukon Zinc were in court Thursday arguing the charges against them are too vague to defend themselves against.

In April 2010, 25-year-old Will Fisher was working with two other employees in a stabilized underground part of the Wolverine mine when a wall caved in and nearly 10 tons of rock came crashing down, burying him alive.

Mine owner Yukon Zinc and contractor Procon Mining are facing a variety of charges under Yukon occupational health and safety regulations, but the companies are demanding prosecutors make it clear exactly what they did that was illegal.

Crown Prosecutor Cindy Freedman says the charges are clear and indicate what regulations were broken, where and when.

The companies are charged with failing to ensure a safe workplace and she says it's up to them to prove they did everything they reasonably could to protect their workers.

The judge will decide by next Friday if the charges should stand, be amended, or thrown out altogether.

Procon Mining pleaded guilty in 2011 to two of eight occupational safety charges it faced in connection with the death of Paul Wentzell, 20, at Wolverine mine. Wentzell was working for Procon as an apprentice mechanic when he was killed by an unoccupied vehicle at the mine site in 2009.

Yukon Zinc's Wolverine property is located 200 kilometres south of Ross River and about 400 kilometres northeast of Whitehorse.

Sunday 26 February 2012

Pike River: Miners accessed self-rescue kits

Extract from nzherald.co.nz

Photographs showing two bodies deep in the Pike River mine highlights the victims' families' desire to recover their loved ones' bodies, says families' spokesman Bernie Monk.

Media reports today that suggested the photographs were new proof that at least some Pike River miners survived the first explosion and had opened self-rescue kits was refuted by counsel for the Pike River Families Group, Nicholas Davidson QC.

Mr Davidson says that referred to evidence which had been "fully developed" in the Royal Commission hearings over many months, and that "it is up to the Royal Commission to address these issues."

While the families have viewed the images, the Royal Commission has ordered that they be suppressed from publication.

But Mr Monk, whose 23-year-old son Michael died in the November 19, 2010 disaster, wants the Royal Commission of Inquiry to release the photos to the public, to help gain further support for recovery.

"It means that there are people to go down for," he says.

"The photos show a man slumped near the self-rescue kits, in a sitting position.

You can see his clothing and boots. The other guy is covered by coal dust.

"The family members are pretty sure who they are and we have asked the commission to release these photos but they are reluctant to do so. But in the future we will look to doing something along those lines.

"These photos of the two guys is evidence of the right that the families have to getting those guys back."

The families have become increasingly angered by the lack of progress in recovering the bodies.

Some families are even debating launching their own private recovering missions.

They have already been forced to pay for independent reports to find alternative methods of recovering the remains of the 29 miners who died in explosions 15 months ago.

A review, commissioned by the families, has given a three-year timeframe for reaching the dead men.

Last week, the families wrote to Prime Minister John Key, via National's West Coast-based list MP Chris Auchinvole, pleading to speed up the recovery process.

Mr Monk declined to elaborate on the contents of the letter until he had heard back from Mr Key.

"All we want is honesty, and verbal contact, but we seem to be like lepers," he said.

"If they think we're going away, well ... it's just not going to happen.

"All we want is our guys back, and we don't think that is asking too much."

This week in mining accident history

26 February 1972

Buffalo Mining

Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, USA

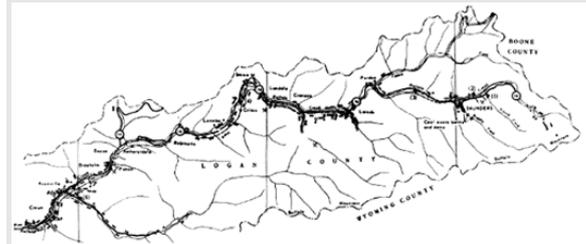
Open cut (strip) coal mining

Flooding; 118 dead and 4,000 homeless

More than thirty years ago, one of the deadliest floods in U.S. history occurred in southern West Virginia's Buffalo Creek hollow. Negligent strip mining and heavy rain produced a raging flood. In a matter of minutes, 118 were dead and over 4,000 people were left homeless. Seven were never found.

Introduction

The towns along seventeen-mile Buffalo Creek--



From Geological Survey Circular 667, *West Virginia's Buffalo Creek Flood*, 2

-- Saunders, Pardee, Lorado, Craneco, Lundale, Stowe, Crites, Latrobe, Robinette, Amherstdale, Becco, Fanco, Braeholm, Accoville, Crown, Kistler -- were built after the completion of a Chesapeake and Ohio Railway spur line in 1914.



They were coal towns, built by coal companies for the support of their mines. The towns' original inhabitants were primarily European immigrants recruited to work the mines. Population

decreased throughout the 1950s and 1960s as mechanized mining replaced many of the men required to mine coal with hand tools and many miners were forced out of work.

Background

Logan County's Buffalo Creek shares its name with at least 9 other state streams. On November 20, 1968, an explosion at a Consolidation Coal Company mine along Buffalo Creek at Farmington, in the northern part of the state, killed 78. Buffalo Creek in Logan County was also no stranger to disaster. On February 12, 1958, a slate fall at an Amherst Coal Company mine at Lundale killed 6 and, on December 12, 1968, a fire at a Buffalo Mining Company mine at nearby Lyburn killed 3.

Buffalo Creek consists of 3 branches. As part of its strip mining operations, the Buffalo Mining Company, a subsidiary of the Pittston Coal Company, began dumping gob -- mine waste consisting of mine dust, shale, clay, low-quality coal, and other impurities -- into the Middle Fork branch as early as 1957. Buffalo Mining constructed its first gob dam, or impoundment, near the mouth of Middle Fork in 1960. Six years later, it added a second dam, 600 feet upstream.



Reconstructed view of the 3 dams above Saunders, taken 27 February 1972, from Geological Survey Circular 667, *West Virginia's Buffalo Creek Flood*, 7 [Photo by the West Virginia Department of Highways]

By 1968, the company was dumping more gob another 600 feet upstream. By 1972, this third dam ranged from 45 to 60 feet in height. The dams and coal mine waste had turned Middle Fork into a series of black pools.



A strip mining site on Buffalo Creek

In 1967, a break in one of the dams caused slight flooding in the hollow. State officials requested a few minor alterations to the impoundment. In February 1971, Dam No. 3 failed, but Dam No. 2 halted the water. The state cited Pittston for violations but failed to follow up with inspections. Pittston, which had developed a reputation for poor safety practices, was cited for over 5,000 safety violations at its mines nationally in 1971. It challenged each of the violations and paid only \$275 of the \$1.3 million levied in fines. By 1972, Pittston was the largest independent coal producer in the country and ranked second in the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents.

The flood

In the days preceding February 26, 1972, rain fell almost continuously, although experts later claimed this was typical for late winter weather in the area. Buffalo Mining officials, concerned about the condition of the highest dam, measured water levels every two hours the night of the twenty-fifth. Although a Pittston official in the area was alerted to the increasing danger, the residents of the hollow were not informed. The company sent away two deputy sheriffs, who had been dispatched to assist with potential evacuations. Despite the lack of warning from company officials, some residents sensed the danger and moved to higher ground.

Just prior to 8:00 a.m. on February 26, heavy-equipment operator Denny Gibson discovered the water had risen to the crest of the impoundment and the dam was "real soggy." At

8:05 a.m., the dam collapsed. The water obliterated the other two impoundments and approximately 132 million gallons of black waste water rushed through the narrow Buffalo Creek hollow.



Looking downstream near the former site of Dam No.

In a matter of minutes, 125 were dead, 1,100 injured, and over 4,000 left homeless

One thousand cars and trucks were destroyed.



The flood demolished 502 houses and 44 mobile homes and damaged 943 houses and mobile homes. Property damage was estimated at \$50 million.

The 15- to 20-foot black wave of water gushed at an average of 7 feet per second and destroyed one town after another. A resident of Amherstdale commented that before the water reached her town, "There was such a cold stillness. There was no words, no dogs, no nothing. It felt like you could reach out and slice the stillness." -- quote from *Everything in Its Path*, by Kai T. Erikson



Another resident commented on the rushing tide, "This water, when it came down through here, it acted real funny. It would go this way on this side of the hill and take a house out, take one house out of all the rows, and then go back the other way. It would just go from one hillside to the other." -- quote from *Everything in Its Path*, by Kai T. Erikson

The flood water first emptied into the Guyandotte River at Man at 10:00 a.m. By 11:00, all of the flood water had poured into the Guyandotte and virtually everything in its path was gone.

Epilogue

In 1978, an attempt to incorporate Buffalo Creek as a town failed by a vote of 816 to 546. Incorporation would have qualified the area for federal and state rehabilitation grants. Opposition to incorporation was backed heavily by coal companies, which owned 60 percent of Logan County's land and wanted to be excluded from incorporation property taxes.

The 1969 federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act had outlawed coal impoundments like those built by the Buffalo Mining Company on Buffalo Creek. The disaster at Buffalo Creek awakened the Mine Health and Safety Administration to the importance of enforcing these federal regulations. In 1973, the West Virginia Legislature passed the Dam Control Act, regulating all dams in the state. However, funding was never appropriated to enforce the law. In 1992, an official with the state Division of Natural Resources estimated there were at least

400 hazardous non-coal dams in West Virginia, many of which were owned by the state.

"People here are not like they used to be. Only people who were in the flood realize that it's not rudeness when you have to ask them to repeat something simply because you weren't listening, your mind was somewhere else. Or you forget to ask them to come back again when they leave after a visit. Or, as happens every day, you start to say something and forget what it was, or just walk away while someone is still talking to you. Or you start looking for something you know you have and then remember, `That was before.'"

-- quote from *Everything in Its Path*, by Kai T. Erikson



Buffalo Creek Memorial at Kistler. Dedicated February 26, 1996 [Photo by Greg Clark]

The aftermath

Three separate commissions studying the disaster -- federal, state, and citizen -- found that Buffalo Mining had blatantly disregarded standard safety practices. Pittston officials called the flood an "Act of God" and said the dam was simply "incapable of holding the water God poured into it." Rev. Charles Crumm, a disabled miner from the Buffalo Creek area, testified before the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the Buffalo Creek Disaster, ". . . I never saw God drive the first slate truck in the holler. . . ." -- Pittston quote from Appalshop film, *Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man* and Crumm quote from *Disaster on Buffalo Creek*, 1972

A circuit court grand jury failed to return any indictments against Pittston despite apparent violations of state and federal laws. Special prosecuting attorney Dean Willard Lorenson of the West Virginia University School of Law commended the jury, "It has been a noble exercise in American justice." -- quote from *Grafton Daily Sentinel*, November 16, 1972

Monday 27 February 2012

USA: Deal with industry weakened mine safety bill

Extract from the Charleston Gazette, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Lawmakers are moving forward this week with mine safety legislation that would add at least two new criminal offenses for advance notice of government mine inspections and certain willful safety violations.

But state regulators say that existing criminal sanctions under West Virginia's mine safety law have seldom -- if ever -- been used in recent years.

West Virginia law already makes it a crime to lie on safety records, to sell counterfeit safety equipment, to remove certain safety devices from underground mines, and to violate a requirement for mandatory safety programs at mining operations.

Barry Koerber, lawyer for the state Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training, said last week that his agency has no authority to bring criminal charges for such offenses.

Only county prosecutors can do that, Koerber said. He said he couldn't recall county prosecutors bringing a mine safety case anytime in the last five to 10 years. Koerber said his agency is supposed to refer potential criminal cases to county prosecutors -- but he couldn't recall an instance where that was done, either.

Such inaction raises questions about the potential effectiveness of any new criminal offenses added to West Virginia's mine safety

law, even as Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and legislative leaders are touting a compromise that appears to have an agreed-to bill headed for final approval.

And changes to the proposed criminal offense language in the current bill illustrate just one example of how lawmakers and the governor's office have weakened a bill that already ignored the strongest recommendations of mine safety experts who investigated the Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster.

For example, the bill that passed out of House Judiciary Committee two weeks ago made it a felony for anyone to willfully violate any state mine safety standard. The new compromise bill makes the criminal offense apply only to willful violations that cause the death of a miner.

The language making it a crime to warn underground workers of an impending government inspection applies only if it can be proven that the advance notice was done "with the intent of undermining" that inspection. Federal law makes any advance notice of inspections a crime, regardless of intent.

"For a century, from the Monongah disaster until today, thousands of coal miners have been maimed at killed in West Virginia's mines, while criminal prosecutions of responsible company officials has been virtually nonexistent," said West Virginia University law professor Pat McGinley, who served on Davitt McAteer's independent team investigating Upper Big Branch. "It is a cruel hoax to assert that criminal sanctions in West Virginia's mine safety law have any deterrent affect when criminal conduct by mine managers is not prosecuted."

At the start of the legislative session, the governor promised mine safety legislation as part of his State of the State address. Tomblin then introduced a bill that focused on drug and alcohol abuse in the mines, a problem all investigators have agreed played no role at Upper Big Branch. House leaders -- including

Speaker Rick Thompson, whose father died in a mining accident -- introduced their own bill.

Last week, with a bill set to move on the House floor, the legislation was pulled over complaints about it from the West Virginia Coal Association. The governor's office and legislative leadership quickly huddled behind closed doors with lobbyists from the coal association and the United Mine Workers.

On Friday, all sides reached a deal, in the form of a floor amendment that was approved Monday afternoon by voice vote.

Along with the drug-testing program, other key provisions of the bill include:

- Language to require mine superintendents to review the mine safety books in which foremen or "firebosses" are to record hazards discovered in various mine examinations and information about what was done to correct those problems. The agreed-to amendment allows this review to occur every two weeks, as opposed to every day, as required under the House Judiciary bill. The agreed-to amendment requires superintendents to sign the book, acknowledging that they have reviewed the fireboss records and "acted accordingly," but does not spell out what "acted accordingly means."
- A provision to increase maximum civil penalties for mine safety violations from \$3,000 to \$5,000. The House leadership's original bill would have increased the maximum fines to \$10,000. Federal law sets maximum federal fines for most violations at \$70,000.
- A section that removes the requirement that changes in mine ventilation plans -- key to controlling explosions and reducing black lung disease -- be approved by the state mine safety director before they're implemented. Under the current bill, state officials could comment on ventilation changes, but mine operators would only

have to follow state recommendations if companies believed those recommendations were "practicable."

- Changes aimed at dealing with repeat violators of state mining law would give inspectors only one new tool: When they find operators who repeatedly violate standards and ignore hazards, inspectors can call in the state training board, which is then charged with instituting new educational programs at the mine in question.

During a two-day legislative hearing three weeks ago, McAteer offered little enthusiasm for the Legislature's approach. McAteer said the provision in the governor's bill was a "distraction" from efforts to prevent another mine disaster.

Among other things, McAteer urged the state to consider requiring every mine operator to implement the safety reforms -- new coal-dust meters and more advanced ventilation monitoring systems -- required in a deal between U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin and Alpha Natural Resources, which bought Upper Big Branch after the disaster.

When they released their Upper Big Branch report last week, state mine safety office representatives said that they really hadn't looked at Goodwin's agreement to see whether it could be turned into an industry-wide initiative.

"We have not studied that in depth at the present time," Koerber said.

Tuesday 28 February 2012

India: Nine killed in mine accident in Obra town in Uttar Pradesh

Extract from News Track India

Obra: At least nine labourers were killed and two critically injured in an accident at an illegal stone quarry mine in Obra town in Uttar Pradesh's Sonabhadra on Tuesday.

The accident happened at wee hours of the morning, the rock under which the labourers were engaged in mining crashed suddenly, crushing the workers to death.

Locals rushed to the spot and rescue operation were immediately initiated.

Ramesh, an eyewitness, told reporters that the mine was functioning illegally for the past several years and the authorities had never paid attention towards the safety of labourers.

"This site has been running illegally for many years. Neither the administration nor the district officers pay any attention. Labourers come here for earning bread and butter from neighbouring states. They work here and get buried and die under the mines, but the administration is not paying any attention," said Ramesh.

He further said the death toll was expected to rise, as the rescue operation would be relaunched in the morning.

"Till now five bodies have been recovered from the site and the toll is expected to rise as it was a huge stone quarry mine," he added.

The two injured were rushed to a nearby primary hospital and their condition is to be critical.

Sonbhadra area known for its rich cover of stone and minerals is also notorious for illegal mining.

Chinese officials sentenced over coal mine deaths

Extract from Xinhua

A CHINESE official has reportedly been sentenced to 13 years in jail for a coal mine flooding in China's Hunan province which resulted in the deaths of 13 people.

The accident happened at the privately run Duxing coal mine in June last year.

The coal mine had been operating illegally at the time of the accident.

It was reported that the local court said four men in total had been charged for the deaths.

The court verdict found former Communist Party of China Sandu township chief Kuang Laojian was guilty of dereliction of duty, abuse of power, taking bribes and corruption.

He was jailed for 13 years.

Meanwhile, former Sandu township head Tao Guosheng was reportedly sentenced to 3.5 years in prison for dereliction of duty and abuse of power.

Another two officials were each jailed for three years for dereliction of duty and corruption.

The court reportedly accused the four officials of ignoring the safety risks at the mine and continuing operations despite the concerns.

Qld: Mum speaks out on mine safety

Extract from Daily Mercury, Qld

THE mother of an Australian miner killed in the Pike River explosion has spoken about mine safety in a CFMEU television ad, which will be aired in Central Queensland from today.



Joanne Ufer speaks out on mine safety in a new TV ad.

Joanne Ufer, whose son Josh Ufer, 25, was one of 29 miners killed in a coalmine explosion at Pike River, New Zealand on November 19, 2010, said mine safety was "just too important to be handed over just to management".

Appearing in the ad, which sends a message to BHP, Ms Ufer says she is "deeply shocked by evidence of negligence of management" at Pike River Mine.

"I never want any other family to have to go through what we have," Ms Ufer, who used to live in Middlemount, said.

"Mine safety is a matter of life and death.

"It is too important to be handed over just to management."

In NW mining, most deaths happen above ground

Extract from KPLU 88.5, Seattle, USA

Federal mine investigators say a Northwest miner died by electrocution because the company that employed him failed to have proper safety procedures in place. The tragedy happened at a gravel pit last September near Pullman, Wash. Most Northwest mine accidents happen above ground.

Thirty-eight-year-old James Hussey worked for DeAtley Crushing, based in Lewiston, Idaho. According to the new federal report, Hussey died when he tried to fix some wiring that no one realized was still connected to the power source.



A photo from the federal investigation into James Hussey's death shows the site of the accident. Photo courtesy MSHA

Nationwide, most fatal mine accidents are in coal mines. But in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, the vast majority of mining is like the DeAtley operation: Sand, gravel and stone extraction. And aside from several recent tragedies in Idaho's underground silver mines, these surface quarries are where most Northwest mine deaths occur -- 11 over last decade.

According to fatality records kept by the Mine Safety and Health Administration, Northwest miners are most often killed by malfunctioning machinery, falling material and -- like James Hussey -- electrical shocks.

DeAtley Crushing issued a statement saying it remains committed to safety. Contrary to the federal findings, the Idaho company says all of its employees, including Hussey, were properly trained.

On the Web:

Federal report on James Hussey's death:

<http://www.msha.gov/fatals/2011/FTL11m09.asp>

Quote of the week



"Don't try to solve serious matters in the middle of the night."

Philip K. Dick
American novelist, 1928-1982

Wednesday 29 February 2012

Canada: Vale should possibly face criminal charges in mining deaths, Steelworkers say

Extract from thestar.com, ca

Ontario should call a public inquiry into the deaths of two Vale mine workers and consider criminal charges against company officials because of widespread neglect of safety, a sweeping union investigation concludes.

In a stinging denunciation of Vale, the United Steelworkers Local 6500 said Wednesday its

probe underlines an urgent need for the province's first inquiry into mine safety in three decades because of industry process changes and lack of enforcement of rules that led to the job fatalities.

Furthermore, the union said the Ministry of the Attorney General should seriously look at charges under the Criminal Code against the Brazilian-based mining giant and several company officials for their conduct in the tragedy.

The union is also calling for a provincial committee to review whether enforcement of occupational health and safety is adequate in the mining industry.

Supervisor Jason Chenier, 35, and miner Jordan Fram, 26, died when a massive run of rock, gravel, sand and water buried them at the Froid-Stobie complex in Sudbury on June 8, 2011.

"This exhaustive report underscores how Vale has failed miserably in its fundamental obligation to protect workers," Steelworkers Local 6500 president Rick Bertrand said Tuesday in advance of the report's release.

"It also shows why there is a critical need for a public inquiry to upgrade safety requirements and ensure this never happens again."

Three Vale workers in Sudbury and another employee in Thompson, Man., have died on the job in the last year.

A joint federal-provincial inquiry in 1981 recommended numerous changes to improve safety after the death of several workers at mining companies including Inco, which sold its operations to Vale in 2004.

The Steelworkers said the union conducted its own investigation after Vale demanded exclusive control. Vale, which weathered a bitter one year strike in 2009-2010, indicated Tuesday the company would not comment until it reviews the report. The labour ministry and Sudbury police are also probing the deaths.

The 207-page report reveals that senior managers knew about a continuing hazardous accumulation of water in the Stobie mine that, in combination with rock and sand, could trigger an uncontrollable blast of material down an ore pass.

The report said management failed to take reasonable precautions to protect workers, including several of them who expressed concerns.

Management also allowed plugged drain holes and additional dumping of "wet muck" into ore passes that led to temporary blockages or "hang-ups" of material and increased the potential danger, the report said.

The report revealed Chenier set up guard rails at two work levels to stop the dumping of material into the ore pass and prevent miners from entering the area because of the water problems. However, management directed the removal of the guard rails up to three times in the days before the accident, the report noted.

Chenier also warned Vale in an email that the company "should not be dumping or blasting this ore pass until the water situation is under control," the report said.

"Vale management pursued a 'production first philosophy' with supervisory and non-supervisory workers," it added. "Stobie mine management knowingly accepted risky practices and failed to address known hazardous work conditions."

USA: Mine safety a personal matter for Speaker, delegates

Extract from The State Journal, W Va, USA

Often, some element of a bill affects a legislator personally, but the personal effect of mine safety legislation primarily on the House of Delegates Tuesday was obvious.

House Speaker Rick Thompson stepped down from the Speaker's podium for the first time in six years in that position to speak about the bill.

Thompson's father died in a mining "mishap" when his then 17-year-old wife was three months pregnant and already had two children.

"I thought long and hard about it," Thompson said on the House floor. "Several times I decided I wouldn't do it. After looking at it, I thought, perhaps I might say something that would affect this down the road, make it more likely to pass."

According to a report from the Bureau of Mines, Thompson's father died from a roof-fall accident in a "small, unnamed mine" near Fort Gay in Wayne County. His father was 21 and had 6 months of coal mining experience. Three of those months had been at the coal mine where he died.

Richard Thompson's death was attributed to a lack of timbers and improper sounding of the mine roof.

"I was looking at a newspaper article a friend of mine had given me about a year ago. Buried in the newspaper was a story about my dad being killed in a mine accident," Thompson said. "Buried in this newspaper, along with who was elected to the telephone office and the birthday dinner that was served in a certain location is the small headline: 'Thompson killed in mine mishap.' In 1952, these were called mishaps and buried in the newspaper. Thank God that's changed."

Thompson said he hoped that among other provisions provided to families of any future mine accident victims in the bill, that they would not have to wait for a full report or newspaper article to learn what happened to their families.

"They shouldn't have to wait to read a newspaper report. They shouldn't have to wait to see a full report to come out," Thompson said. "They should be kept up to date."

Thompson also shed some light on compromises made in the bill. He said he brought the director of state mine safety, who was concerned about a provision allowing family members to appoint a representative to attend investigation hearings, into his own office.

The legislation, as amended, would only allow up to five to be appointed to attend the investigation.

"I brought the director of mine safety up to my office and his concern was that if we have another tragedy like Upper Big Branch, that there would be too many people, that it would hinder the investigation. I didn't like it, but there was a limitation placed on the file and I agreed to that, that limitation."

Thompson said he agreed to the limitation because the director committed to ensuring another accident wouldn't happen. Thompson said he told the director that he was "counting on" that not happening because the resources and people needed would be dedicated to preventing another mass-casualty incident.

"That's the only reason I agreed to it," Thompson said.

Thompson read from the recommendations provided to improve mine safety in the report of his father's death.

"The following recommendations, if properly applied, might prevent accidents of a similar nature in the future," Thompson said. "Is that what we're looking for? Might? We want recommendations that will prevent, and I think we should expect that, and I expect that."

Delegate Charlene Marshall, D-Monongalia, also shared her personal connections to mine tragedies and her "deep feelings about the bill. She defended the provisions of the bill that extended the family's ability to stay current with post-disaster investigations.

"In my family, we've had three killed in the mines, and I know my grandmother would have wanted to have some closing and know some things about the deaths of my grandfather," Marshall said.

Marshall lost her grandfather, father and stepfather to coal mining accidents.

"If there is anyone here who thinks that they can't vote for this bill – if this would ever strike

close to your home, you would then get the message," Marshall said. "I'm looking forward to this. Even as a child I wondered if there was anything I could do to improve any conditions."

She said she hopes this mine safety bill will offer something to other families that her own was denied.

"I know that everyone wants to go to their jobs and return home to their families," Marshall said. "We didn't have that in my family, so I am pleased we have this bill today."

Delegate Rick Snuffer, R-Raleigh, is one of the five delegates who represent the county where Upper Big Branch occurred. In addition to attending funerals and praying alongside family members, Snuffer said he remembers seeing the families on their way to the mines after the tragedy occurred.

"I can remember looking in the faces of the families driving to the mines and there was no doubt they were the families," Snuffer said.

Snuffer said if current law had been followed and enforced, the victims of UBB would not have died in the UBB mine that night.

"That is a sad indictment, and we should pass every law we can to make mining safer," he said. He added, "If we're not going to enforce the laws that are on the books now, why pass more?"

Delegate Mike Caputo, D-Marion, is a longtime and vocal supporter of the United Mine Workers of America. Its report of the accident was titled "Industrial Homicide," and Caputo was no less reserved in calling out UBB owner Massey Energy.

"This wasn't only bad business practices," Caputo yelled on the House floor. "This was akin to organized crime, and it should be treated as such. I hope that this federal investigation starts at the bottom and works its way all the way clear to the top. ... It's my hope that someday I can watch Don Blankenship hauled off in shackles

and sent to jail for the murder of these 29 men at Upper Big Branch."

USA: Feds Take Davitt McAteer's Files

Extract from West Virginia MetroNews

The U.S. Government's Office of the Inspector General has seized records and files from the offices of Davitt McAteer, a vice president at Wheeling Jesuit University and outspoken coal mine accident investigator.

McAteer, who is the former head of the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, confirms that the federal investigators took records from his offices in Wheeling and Shepherdstown February 15th, made copies, and then returned the records.

The Inspector General's Office conducts independent audits, investigations and inspections of federal programs.

McAteer is the director of the National Technology Transfer Center and the Erma Ora Byrd Center for Education Technologies--two federal program at Wheeling Jesuit. The Inspector General's Office is apparently interested in how McAteer was paid for his work on UBB while also employed with those two federal programs.

McAteer had no comment on the investigation, but he did explain that the state compensated Wheeling Jesuit for the time he spent on the UBB probe.

MetroNews could not reach the Office of the Inspector General for comment.

USA: Hughie Elbert Stover, former Upper Big Branch mine security chief, sentenced

Extract from www.globalpost.com

CHARLESTON, West Virginia - The former security chief at a coal mine where 29 miners died in 2010 was sentenced on Wednesday to three years in prison for lying to federal agents

and obstructing an investigation into the worst accident in the U.S. mining industry in four decades.

Hughie Elbert Stover of Clear Fork, West Virginia, had faced a maximum possible sentence of 25 years in prison by U.S. District Judge Irene Berger in Beckley, West Virginia.

He was convicted last October of giving false statements to FBI and Mine Safety and Health Administration investigators and with obstructing the federal investigation into the cause of the Upper Big Branch disaster.

An explosion at the mine, owned by the now-defunct Massey Energy, killed 29 miners in April 2010.

"Today's sentence sends a clear message that when a person obstructs an investigation - especially an investigation as critical as UBB - there will be consequences," U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin said in a statement.

Prosecutors said Stover had lied when he told FBI and mine safety investigators that security guards had not routinely warned mine personnel when inspectors were on their way to the mine.

But investigators discovered that Stover himself warned mine personnel when mine safety inspectors were on their way. Stover also instructed another person to destroy thousands of Massey Energy documents related to the UBB mine, prosecutors said.

"I was hoping that his sentence would have had a little more time, but at least he will be taken away from his family," said Shereen Atkins, of Racine, West Virginia, whose son Jason Atkins died in the UBB explosion.

"Of course, 36 months for him does not compare to my life sentence I received on April 5th when me and my husband lost our son," she said.

Last week, a former superintendent of the mine was charged with felony conspiracy, accused of tipping off employees to safety inspections and concealing dangerous violations.

The former superintendent, Gary May, is the highest-ranking Massey official to face criminal charges, which were laid out against him and "others known and unknown" in a criminal information filing, typically used when someone is expected to enter into a plea agreement with prosecutors.

Massey has since been bought by Alpha Natural Resources.

Three reports, including a preliminary report by the mine safety administration and a report released by the United Mine Workers of America, blame Massey for the disaster by allowing unsafe conditions in the mine.

USA: Final report on Stillwater Mine fatality blames management

Extract from 4KXLF.com, Montana, USA

BILLINGS - Federal investigators have determined that a lack of proper training by company management was to blame for a fatal accident that killed one man at the Stillwater Mine last October.

The U.S. Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) has released the official report (link below) on the accident that killed 42 year old Dale Madson on October 31st 2011. Madson was working underground at the Nye mine at the time of the accident. The report releases details about Madson's death and concludes, "The accident occurred because management's policies and procedures failed to ensure equipment operators maintained control of mobile equipment while operating equipment."

The report states Madson was operating an open cab truck 1,200 feet underground when his vehicle lost control on an "S" curve and struck the mine wall several times resulting in a piece of rebar striking him in the neck. Madson was pronounced dead at 6:15 p.m. on October 31, 2011. He had been employed at the mine since 2008.

Investigators found that Madson's training did not specifically address the hazards resulting in the accident. After the accident, Stillwater Mine management established procedures and policies to ensure that equipment operators operate mobile equipment safely. All persons that operate mobile equipment were trained by December of 2011 regarding these new policies and procedures.

Stillwater Mining Co. spokesman John Beaudry made a brief statement on behalf of the company following the report.

"Our sympathies continue to be with the family and friends," said Beaudry.

Stillwater Mine received 27 citations after the accident, 11 of which the MSHA considered significant violations which could cause injury. Madson's death was the first fatal accident at the mine in six years.

Madson was a Missoula native who moved to the Red Lodge area after working as an electrician apprentice and at Stimson Lumber. Family friends say Madson was also a newlywed and had been married for about four months.

MSHA report at:

<http://www.msha.gov/FATALS/2011/FTL11m12.asp>

Canada: Mining death report released

Extract from www.chch.com

The United Steelworkers Union has released the findings of its eight month investigation into the deaths of two miners at Vale's mine in Sudbury, Ontario last year.

The union is calling for a public inquiry, saying Vale failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent the deaths of the two miners last June. The 200-page report presents evidence that Vale knew there was a problem in the mine before the workers died.

Jason Chenier, 35, and Jordan Fram, 26, were working 900 metres underground when they were killed when a run of muck - broken rock,

mixed with sand and water - came down an ore pass. The report says one of the miners warned management in the days before he died that there was a buildup of water in the ore pass, and that work should stop until the water situation was under control.

Wayne Fraser of the United Steelworkers Union: "Jason Chenier sent 2 emails to management warning them of the dangerous water levels but nothing was done and we don't know why."

"This isn't an accident this is a preventable occurrence of an event that had the company done its job, they would be with us today."

Jordan Fram's sister Brianna spoke about what life has been like for her family after the accident.

"We feel the pain of losing Jordan every day there's never a morning I wake up and wish that all this has been a nightmare and there's never a day that goes by that we do not shed a tear that he is gone."

"I have come here today to ask that things change in Ontario mines. I have not only lost a brother but also my mentor and friend."

The union is also pushing the attorney general's office to consider criminal charges against company officials under the Westray Bill. It's named after a 1992 coal mining disaster in Nova Scotia, and makes workplace negligence a criminal offence.

Thursday 1 March 2012

USA: Longtime inspector named Kentucky mine safety chief

Extract from Louisville Courier-Journal

FRANKFORT, KY. — A longtime inspector was appointed Thursday as executive director of the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing, the state agency charged with enforcing laws that keep coal miners safe.

Freddie Lewis previously worked for nine years in the agency's Pikeville regional office as a mine safety analyst, mine inspector, mine rescue team member and an instructor. He most recently served as manager of safety and training for Alliance Coal Co.

"I've got one focus," Lewis said Thursday. "That's to do the very best I can to see to it that each and every coal miner goes home to his family at the end of his shift."

Lewis comes with endorsements of Tony Oppegard, one of the nation's leading mine safety advocates, and Steve Earle, a regional vice president of the United Mine Workers union.

"I hold Freddie in high regard," Oppegard said. "He was an excellent inspector who was very strong for safety. So I think he's a good choice. I think he'll work hard and have the miners' best interest at heart."

Earle said having the endorsements of mine safety advocates speaks well of Lewis.

"We wish him the best in this huge job," Earle said. "We're going to give him all the support we can."

Lewis replaces Johnny Greene, who retired in December.

"Mine safety is a top priority in this cabinet, and I have every confidence that Freddie Lewis will help us focus on making sure our miners go to work each day with the knowledge that we value their health and welfare," Energy and Environment Secretary Len Peters said in a statement. "His background in mine safety will, I believe, ensure we accomplish that goal."

The Office of Mine Safety and Licensing, with 162 employees, is charged with providing safe working conditions for coal miners, as well as training miners to work safely.

The agency's inspectors enforce laws and regulations relating to workplace safety.

"We can never back down from making sure our miners are safe," said Natural Resources

Commissioner Steve Hohmann. "One of the biggest challenges Freddie faces is the continued diligence of his agency in implementing the drug-testing program to keep the mines drug-free."

WA: Worker dies at Goldfields mine site

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

A man has died while working at a mine in the WA goldfields.

His employer, AngloGold Ashanti Australia, says the man was found unconscious at the controls of his equipment at the Sunrise Dam gold mine near Laverton, just after 8:20am today.

The mine site's nurses attended the scene and cardiopulmonary resuscitation was administered with advice from the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

However, the man was pronounced dead at 9.15am.

AngloGold Ashanti said the man's next of kin were being notified.

The Department of Mines and Petroleum will investigate.

Ukraine: At least 6 miners trapped in Donetsk

Extract from The Voice of Russia

An explosion at an illegal coal mine in the Donetsk region in the south-east of Ukraine has trapped at least six miners according to local television reports.

According to rescuers, the accident occurred the night before, but it only became known on Thursday.

According to preliminary information, the cause of the accident could be a violation of safety regulations.

Experts say they can not get into the mine because of the lack of a ladder or a mechanism that could lower people 185 meters.

Friday 2 March 2012

USA: Accident at coal mine injures eight

Extract from WTHI, USA

OAKTOWN, Ind. (WTHI) - An accident at a local coal mine injures eight people.

At around 1:30 Friday morning emergency crews were called to the Black Panther Mine just outside of Oaktown in Knox County.

An underground vehicle reportedly crashed, injuring eight people.

The extent of their injuries is not known, but scanner reports say people were complaining of back pain, and suffered cuts.

Saturday 3 March 2012

USA: Identity of KY coal miner killed in overnight accident released

Extract from www.wbir.com, USA

Officials in Kentucky say a miner was killed overnight while working at the Timber Tree Mine near the Blair Community, in Harlan County.

Harlan County Coroner Jim Bush confirms the miner was 32-year-old James Bailey, of Cumberland, a mine foreman. He suffered blunt force trauma to the head and chest.

A press release from the Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet says the miner was repairing a canopy - the protective covering over a shuttle car - when the canopy collapsed. The accident was reported at 5:40 a.m. No one else was hurt.

The mine is owned by Parton Brothers Mining. Investigators from the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing are at the mine leading the investigation.

This is the first mining fatality reported in Kentucky in 2012.

Sunday 4 March 2012

Mine mishap: BJP demands case against Mayawati, Siddiqui

Extract from www.dnaindia.com

BJP on Sunday demanded lodging of cases against Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati, her cabinet colleague Naseemuddin Siddiqui and senior officials, alleging that they gave patronage to "mining mafia" due to which the mishap in which 10 people were killed in a stone mine in Sonebhadra took place.

"We demand lodging of FIRs against Mayawati, Siddiqui, senior officers, including district magistrate, for giving patronage to mining mafia...The tragic incident took place as administration turned blind eye towards the mafia, who are relatives of BSP leaders including its state president Swami Prasad Maurya," BJP state chief Surya Pratap Shahi alleged.

He was in the district to take stock of the situation.

At least 10 people were killed on February 27 when a stone mine caved in Obra area. The cause of the incident was stated to be illegal mining.

Shahi said BJP would constitute a five-member committee comprising revenue, environment and mining experts to probe the incident and also give its recommendations for the betterment of labourers who are being exploited here.

"The illegal minings grew in the area due to the blessing of the state government," he said.

Claiming that mining in the district was against the SC orders, Shahi alleged after the incident the district administrate started rescue operation very late due to which injured labourers could not be provided timely relief.

He demanded that the state government should provide Rs10 lakh compensation to the family of

those who died in the accident and Rs2.5 lakh to the injured.

Shahi also announced Rs25 lakh from the party fund to the family of the deceased and Rs10,000 to the injured.

China: Two dead, one missing from mine collapse

Extract from Xinhua

YICHANG, -- Two people have been confirmed dead and another one remains missing after an illegal peat mine collapsed late Saturday in Hubei Province, the local government said Sunday.

The accident occurred at about 10 p.m. when three workers were inside the illicit mine near Shuangjingsi Village in Yidu City, a statement from the city government said.

One worker was killed on the spot and the other died on the way to hospital, the statement said.

As of 5 p.m. Sunday, a team of 17 rescuers are still searching for the missing worker.

Monday 5 March 2012

Three Dead in Peru Mining Accident

Extract from Latin American Herald Tribune

LIMA – Three workers trapped by a cave-in at a mine in central Peru are dead, the regional emergency services chief told Canal N television on Friday.

Jose Luis Vicuña identified the victims of Thursday's accident only as three men ages 19, 22 and 32.

Efforts to recover the bodies will likely not begin before early Saturday, as personnel must travel four-to-five hours on foot to reach the mine, he said.

Sources in the Peru National Police told Efe that officers at a precinct in the Lima municipality of Chaclacayo, which is closest to the mine, have organized a team of 40 people to hike to the

scene of the disaster once the exact location is verified from the air.

Authorities were alerted to the cave-in by a miner who managed to get out in time and went to the Chaclacayo precinct to seek help for his trapped comrades.

USA: Richard Coots, Kentucky Miner, Killed Due To Company Failures: Feds

Extract from Huffington Post, USA

Richard Coots, Jr. wasn't killed in a massive explosion, and the accident that claimed him barely made a ripple of news beyond Eastern Kentucky. He died the way coal miners typically die on the job, in one- or two-man tragedies. His death was not followed by a candlelight vigil.

On Oct. 7, 2011, Coots was killed in Owlco Energy Mine No. 1, in Letcher County, Ky. He was trying to fix a busted conveyor belt when he was crushed by a large piece of mining machinery. His body was carried out of the mine with the help of his younger brother, Jeremy Coots, who was working nearby. The elder Coots, who was known simply as "Junior," was only 23 years old.

On Thursday the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released its investigation into Coots' death. Federal officials determined that Coots was killed because the management at Owlco had failed to take the necessary precautions for the repair and hadn't trained its miners properly. The accident was deemed "correctable through reasonable management controls." Owlco has not yet been fined for any failings.

"Richard Coots is the story of the Appalachian coal miner," says Tony Oppegard, the lawyer and mine-safety expert representing Coots' widow, Kayla. "He's a young guy, he's only been at the mine for six weeks, he's working at a little doghole operation trying to support his family, and this accident never should have happened. Now you have a young widow with two children

to support, all because you have an operator who doesn't care to do things the right way."

According to the accident investigation, a piece of mining machinery known as the bridge conveyor had broken down during the shift before Coots'. The bridge conveyor acts as a conveyor belt running coal out of the mine, and so long as it was down the mine couldn't produce coal. In order to fix what was broken, the miners needed to prop the bridge up. But rather than use blocks that are designated for such tasks, the foreman and another miner slipped a large rock beneath the suspended conveyor bridge, according to the report.

The repairs weren't finished by the time Coots' night shift started. Working with other miners, Coots crawled under the conveyor bridge to remove the damaged chains. At some point, the bridge slipped off the rock, pinning Coots to the floor of the mine. "Get it off me!" he shouted to his brother and another co-worker. By the time the miners managed to lift the bridge, Coots was unresponsive. He was taken to the hospital in an ambulance and pronounced dead at 4:10 a.m., an hour and a half after he was pulled from the mine.

Coots had been mining since he'd gotten out of high school five years earlier, though he'd been at Owlco for only a month and a half. The report cites "deficiencies with the training" that Coots received at Owlco, and notes that managers at the mine hadn't made sure the bridge conveyor was held in place while Coots and others worked on it. After Coots died, Owlco was forced to develop a written procedure for such repairs and employees had to be trained on how to perform them. "The training records for the other miners were examined and deficiencies were found for other company employees," the investigation reads.

Early Friday, Oppegard asked MSHA to amend its report, arguing that the mine foreman knew the repairs were being done improperly but allowed them to proceed anyway. According to the Coots family, the appropriate blocks to prop

up the bridge were located nearby in the mine and could have been picked up in minutes. Oppegard also argued that mine management hadn't performed and recorded the necessary shift examinations so that miners would know of any dangers in the mine.

The phone at Owlco was not answered Friday when a reporter called seeking comment.

When he died, Coots left behind two daughters, a 4-year-old and a 2-month-old. Coots' other younger brother, Justin, 20, died in a 2010 car crash in Kentucky. He, too, was a miner, and he was driving home from work when the accident occurred, according to NBC Lexington.

Coots' widow, Kayla, has not filed a lawsuit against Owlco. The only payments she's received due to the accident are from her husband's worker compensation benefits, according to Oppegard.

At some companies, the pressure to keep coal moving can be tremendous, and miners are often discouraged from complaining about work conditions. According to federal officials who investigated the Upper Big Branch disaster, which claimed 29 lives in West Virginia in 2010, miners who spoke out about safety in the mine were threatened with dismissal, and mine officials maintained two sets of books in order to cover up safety problems from investigators.

Kentucky led the nation in mining deaths last year with eight. All told, 21 American coal miners were killed on the job in 2011, down from 48 in the year of Upper Big Branch, according to data from MSHA. Unlike with massive tragedies like Upper Big Branch, most miners are killed in isolated and little-noticed incidents, like Coots was. Many die in smaller mines that have little or no union presence and relatively light oversight from federal or state agencies.

"This is exactly the kind of fatality that you usually never hear about," says Oppegard. "One guy is killed in a little non-union mine and no one hears a thing."

Read MSHA's investigative report on Coots' death:

<http://www.msha.gov/FATALS/2011/FTL11c16.pdf>

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

Belt conveyor

A looped belt on which coal or other materials can be carried and which is generally constructed of flame-resistant material or of reinforced rubber or rubber-like substance.



Fire resistant belt conveyor at a coal mine

-Ed