



# Mining Accident News No.1206

6 to 18 March 2012

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Tuesday 6 March 2012

## Chilean mining hasn't missed a beat after accident

*Extract from Edmonton Journal, Canada*

Little more than a year after navigating through a potentially deadly mining accident that captured worldwide attention, the Chilean mining industry has not missed a beat, announcing US\$91-billion in new mining projects over the next eight years, including US\$24.5-billion from Canada.



Chilean miner Mario Sepulveda (C) hugs his wife after being brought to the surface on October 13, 2010 following a 10-week ordeal in the collapsed San Jose mine, near Copiapo, 800 km north of Santiago, Chile.

Photograph by: Hugo Infante , AFP/Getty Images

Hernan de Solminihac, the Chilean mining minister, said the group of 25 companies from both within Chile and the rest of the world (60% of the investment is foreign) will be developing mining projects mostly in copper, gold and silver, as well as iron and non-metallics.

Certainly, the fact that the Chilean government was able to rescue all 33 trapped miners from a cave-in at the San Jose copper and gold mine after a much-publicized 69-day ordeal has helped to boost confidence in Chile's mining industry, he said.

"That accident in 2010 was very important for us as we learned a lot from that accident," he said in an interview after the announcement. "We've made a lot of changes."

The Chilean government has invested heavily in new safety regulations, including significantly

**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  
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more onsite safety supervision for longer periods of time. Miners must also undergo more safety training.

The private sector has also played a role in improving working conditions, Mr. de Solminihac said.

As a result, in the past year the number of workplace mining deaths has decreased 46% compared with 2010, he said.

"In general, the mining industry is very safe. But when there's an accident the risk of death is very high," he said. "We're doing a lot of work to save lives, and we're working very hard."

## Chile mine to pay \$5m for rescue of trapped miners

*Extract from BBC News, Latin America & Caribbean*

The owners of the mine in Chile where 33 men were trapped for 69 days will pay \$5m (£3.2m) towards their rescue.

The sum was agreed in a deal between the Chilean government and the San Esteban Mining Company.

The government says it is less than a quarter of what it paid for the 2010 rescue, which involved drilling a 700m shaft to pull the men out.

A trustee for the mine said the company was on the brink of bankruptcy, and could not afford to pay more.

The government had sued the San Esteban Mining Company in an attempt to recoup the \$22m it said it spent on the rescue.

### Legal wranglings

Maria Loreto Reid, the trustee for the company, said its owners "had always wanted to contribute something towards the rescue".

She welcomed the agreement, which "avoided a continuation of the lawsuit, which is always long and tortuous".

A lawyer representing 31 out of the 33 miners who were trapped in the 2010 accident at the

San Jose mine also praised the agreement, calling it "prudent and sensible".

The lawyer, Remberto Valdes, said the \$5m sum was "the maximum which could be obtained considering the dismal financial situation of the company".

So far, no deal has been reached on the future of the mines owned by the company.

The San Jose mine has remained shut since the accident on 5 August 2010.

Following the rescue, Chilean President Sebastian Pinera had vowed it would never open again.

The miners who were trapped underground argue that is a step which the government should have taken much earlier.

Thirty-one of the miners are pursuing legal action against the state, accusing it of failing to do its job properly by allowing the mine to remain open in the years before the accident.

They are claiming compensation of over \$500,000 per man.

## Blast kills five trespassers at PNG gold mine

*Extract from channel6news.com*

ENGA, Papua New Guinea - Five people who illegally entered a large gold mine in Papua New Guinea were killed in a routine blast during the weekend, the mine operator reported on Tuesday. Three survivors were arrested and charged.

The accident happened at around 5.25 a.m. local time on Saturday when mine operator Barrick Niugini Ltd., which is internationally known as Barrick Gold, carried out a routine blast at the Porgera Gold Mine in Enga province. The mine is one of the top producing gold mines in the world.

Barrick said its local staff were alerted by an injured trespasser who said others were missing in the mine, after which a search-and-rescue

operation led to the discovery of five bodies. "We deeply regret this loss of life - it tragically demonstrates that the mine is not a safe place to be for unauthorized persons," said Greg Walker, the executive general manager of Barrick Niugini Ltd.

'The National' newspaper reported that a group of eight people had illegally entered the mine to look for gold. Five of them were killed in the routine blast while the three survivors were later taken into custody and charged with trespassing. At least one of the survivors was injured.

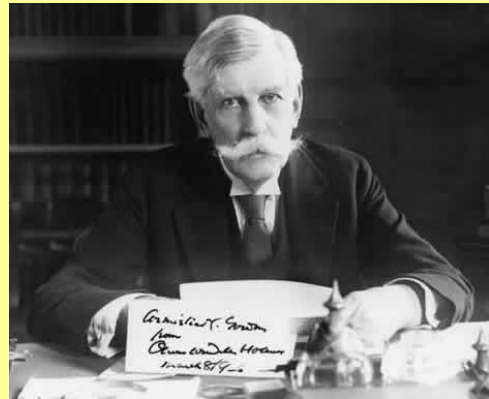
"I extend my condolences to the families of those who died but, time and time again, we have been warning the people that blasts are always going on," Enga Governor Peter Ipatas told 'The National'. "When it comes to mining companies, they use chemicals which are dangerous. They use explosives which are dangerous."

Local police officials said two of the victims were from the town of Laiagam while a third victim was from nearby Porgera.

"These people were in the wrong place. The mining company has been mandated by law to do mining. They give sufficient warning and clear the blast area," Ipatas was quoted as saying by the newspaper. "These people were willing to put their lives at risk for gold. They have paid the ultimate price. While I extend my sympathies, this should be a warning to everybody who wants to trespass at the mine and do illegal mining."

In August 1994, eleven people were killed when a blast destroyed the Dyno Wesfarmers explosives factory at the Porgera Gold Mine. The powerful blast, which left a crater 40 meters (131 feet) wide and 15 meters (49 feet) deep, damaged property up to 2 kilometers (1.2 mile) away. Several government investigations failed to determine the exact cause of the accident.

### Quote of the week



"The great thing in this world is not so much where you stand, as in what direction you are moving."

Oliver Wendell Holmes  
American jurist, 1809-1894

Wednesday 7 March 2012

## South Africa sets goal of testing all miners for tuberculosis, getting sufferers treated

*Extract from the Washington Post, USA*

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa wants to test hundreds of thousands of miners for tuberculosis and ensure sufferers get treatment over the next year, a government health official said Tuesday.

Dr. David Mametja, head of the government's TB fighting program, said the government is concerned the high prevalence of the disease among miners is holding an entire region back in the fight against TB.

He said it may be impossible to reach the nearly 600,000 miners in South Africa in one year, even those at highest risk in the gold industry, but that setting an ambitious targets is a way to show "it's not business as usual."

Mametja spoke to reporters at a workshop organized by the Stop TB Partnership, which brings together the U.N.'s World Health Organization and some 1,000 governments and private groups around the world to fight the disease. The partnership says that Africa is the only region in the world likely to miss the U.N.

Millennium Development Goal of halving TB deaths by 2015, and that the high numbers of miners with TB is driving the crisis. Gold mining is of particular concern because it has been linked to silicosis, an incurable lung disease that increases vulnerability to TB.

South Africa's mining industry draws workers from neighboring countries and beyond. Dr. Llang Maama-Maime, a government TB expert from Lesotho who joined Tuesday's workshop, described some of the challenges that presents. Some 33,000 Lesotho citizens are working in South African mines, she said. Those among them diagnosed with TB might start treatment in South Africa, and not follow up at home. Stopping treatment increases the chances a TB case will grow resistance to drugs.

Maama-Maime added that workers diagnosed at home may start treatment, then, pushed by poverty, return to work in South Africa before completing a course. More than half Lesotho's citizens live below the poverty line.

Mametja said estimates of the prevalence of miners with TB vary. But even the lowest estimate, 5 percent, was well above the figure of 1 percent for the general population, he said. He said the problem should be taken as seriously as accidents that cause mining deaths.

"There's a silent kind of accident happening, which is called TB," he said.

The problem is particularly worrying given South Africa's high rate of HIV infection. TB is the biggest killer of HIV-positive South Africans, whose resistance to disease is lowered.

Some fear a testing campaign will overwhelm the health system with new TB patients, Mametja said. But given that an infected person who is untreated can infect 10-15 other people in a year, and that late-stage TB is much more difficult and expensive to treat, Mametja said testing was crucial.

"The truth is, doing nothing only overwhelms the system more," he said.

Mametja could not put a price on his testing campaign. He said the government was counting on mining companies, the largest of which have clinics and hospitals, to help.

Dr. Thuthula Balfour-Kaipa, a health adviser to the Chamber of Mines, the main industry group for mining companies, said Tuesday that the industry welcomed the government's focus on testing.

## Upper Big Branch Mine: Report Says MSHA Missed Problems Before Accident

*Extract from The Huffington Post, USA*

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — Federal inspectors either missed problems at West Virginia's Upper Big Branch mine or failed to inspect the areas where they existed in the 18 months before a deadly 2010 explosion, but an internal review concludes there's no evidence those failures caused the disaster.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration posted the report online Tuesday after briefing relatives of the 29 miners killed in the nation's worst coal mining disaster in four decades.

The report acknowledges multiple failures by field staff in MSHA's largest region, southern West Virginia's District 4. It also said their effectiveness was compromised by internal communication problems and by federal budget cuts that had created staffing shortages, inexperience and a lack of sufficient training and managerial oversight.

Although MSHA has made significant improvements in the past two years, the report said it's not enough and contains about 20 pages of detailed, technical recommendations for regulatory and administrative changes.

"More must be done to protect the health and safety of the nation's miners," it said.

MSHA director Joe Main said he takes the findings seriously and praised the review team for identifying systemic breakdowns.



"We can't just do internal reviews. We have to fix the problems," he said. "We take responsibility for the agency's actions here. We have an obligation to fix these things, and yes, we're going to do that."

Gary Quarles, whose son Gary Wayne died in the blast, said he would take some satisfaction in hearing Main and other MSHA officials accept responsibility, "as long as they do their part and make sure this don't happen again."

Quarles said many people at the private meeting told regulators they were as much to blame as the former mine operator, Massey Energy.

"And they sat there and took it. They never said they weren't at fault," he said. "More or less, they was taking blame. I don't see how they could have kept from it."

While the report focuses on systemic failures, Main said he will review whether administrative actions should also be taken against individuals. But he said blame for the disaster continues to rest squarely with Massey, bought last summer by Virginia-based Alpha Natural Resources.

Four investigations have concluded the blast was sparked by worn and broken equipment, fueled by a deadly buildup of methane and coal dust, and allowed to spread because of clogged and broken water sprayers.

MSHA investigators found Massey made "systematic, intentional and aggressive efforts" to hide problems and throw off inspectors, even falsifying safety records. Managers also alerted miners when inspectors arrived, allowing time to disguise or temporarily fix dangerous conditions.

The former superintendent has been charged with conspiracy to commit fraud and is cooperating in a Department of Justice investigation. A former security chief, meanwhile, has been sentenced to three years in prison for lying to investigators and attempting to destroy records.

The internal review said MSHA inspectors consistently failed to identify problems with

accumulations of explosive coal dust and deviations from ventilation and roof control plans. It also said they failed to use the operator's examination books to determine whether hazards had been corrected.

It noted those inspectors failed to identify 10 safety violations that MSHA's accident investigation team later determined had contributed to the blast. In some cases, they didn't recognize hazards, the report said. In others, they just didn't inspect the areas where they existed.

Although inspectors wrote a total of 684 violations in the 18 months before the blast, the report said they failed to act on eight that could have been deemed "flagrant," the most serious designation. They also failed to conduct special investigations on at least six occasions to determine whether managers knowingly violated safety standards.

The report, conducted by MSHA employees outside District 4, found that "inadequate direction training and supervision" was as much a problem as inexperienced inspectors.

But it tempered the criticism, noting that MSHA's messages were not communicated consistently, resulting in "unclear, redundant and conflicting instructions" to inspectors.

Main, who took over the agency in October 2009, said MSHA had a centralized process for communicating policies until 2002. It is now virtually impossible for field staff to know about the 199 policies the agency has adopted since 2004, he said.

"There was an overload, to a certain extent," Main said. "Depending on when you were hired and where you were trained, you may or may not have received some of those instructions."

MSHA is currently rewriting its inspector manual, consolidating and clarifying the policies. It's also overhauling its training programs.

At more than 200 pages, plus appendices, the internal review is more comprehensive than

similar agency appraisals done after five mine disasters since 2001.

As in this one, each review concluded that MSHA employees had done incomplete or inadequate inspections, that inspectors had inadequate supervision and direction, and that inspectors failed to identify the mine operator's deviation from approved mining plans.

"There's a lot of things in this report that goes deep into the weeds to figure out what the problems are and how to fix it, so it looks worse than other internal reviews," Main said. "But this is something we needed to do."

## 9 missing after northwest Colombia mining accident

*Extract from colombiareports.com*

Nine people were reported trapped in a rural area just outside Medellin Tuesday after the coal mine the victims were working in flooded.



The president of the local mining association told newspaper El Tiempo the accident occurred around 3:30pm in the municipality of Angelopolis, five miles southwest of Colombia's second largest city.

According to authorities, rescue workers were sent to the site of the allegedly illegal mine.

Dozens of Colombian miners are killed in work-related accidents each year.

Thursday 8 March 2012

## NZ: Pike workers made redundant

*Extract from NewstalkZB, New Zealand*



Pike workers made redundant. Photo: NZ Herald

Eight people working on the recovery of the Pike River mine have been made redundant.

That equates to around half of the workforce.

The father of one of the 29 miners killed in the tragedy, Marty Palmer, is among them.

He says the move came out of the blue.

"Very hard, leaving the boys up there, you got 29 men up there and we've been there battling everyday. I don't know where we'll go from here but we're going to still keep the pressure on," he says.

Mr Palmer says it was very hard to walk away from the mine yesterday with his son Brendon still inside.

## Seven missing after accident at goldmine

*Extract from IPPmedia, India*

At least seven people went missing on Tuesday this week after a group of unlicensed miners were reportedly buried underground in an inactive area at AngloGold Ashanti's Geita Gold Mine.

The tunnel the miners got buried in collapsed into deep water, according to a press statement issued in Dar es Salaam yesterday by the goldmine's managing director Gary Davies.

The statement said only three miners were known to have survived in the accident so far.

It said the mine security guards became aware of the incident during routine surveillance and immediately they notified police and Geita Gold Mine's emergency response team.

Davies said the area had been sealed by police and AngloGold Ashanti is actively supporting an ongoing police investigation into the incident.

"There is limited access to the accident site and conditions have deteriorated due to recent heavy rains, resulting in a determination by police and company officials that the situation is not conducive to underwater recovery operations at this time," he said, adding:

"AngloGold Ashanti greatly regrets any loss of life and is committed to partnering with host communities and governments to promote safe and responsible mining in the areas where we operate".

## 1 of 9 trapped miners rescued in northwest Colombia

*Extract from colombiareports.com*

Rescue workers have been able to release one of nine miners who were trapped in a coalmine in northwestern Colombia after their illegal mine flooded, newspaper La Vanguardia reports.



Photo: El Colombiano

Local newspaper El Colombiano did not confirm the rescue, but said that at least four of the miners are thought to be alive and that a rescue workers spokesman said that "we hope to rescue them in the course of the morning."

The rescue workers fear for the lives of the remaining five miners who are trapped in a shaft some 200 meters below ground.

The accident took place Wednesday afternoon when the mine in the municipality of Angelopolis flooded, trapping the nine victims.

**UPDATE** (8 March 2012): Authorities recovered the bodies of at least four miners trapped after their illegal coalmine flooded in northwest Colombia.

Relief agencies reported that the bodies were found 171 meters below ground at the site in the municipality of Angelopolis, Antioquia department.

Nine men were trapped when the mine flooded Wednesday. Only one miner has been rescued so far.

In a statement, the Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining reported that the mine was illegal, but site owner Arnulfo Velasquez told media that he has documentation allowing him to operate legally in the area.

### 2011 Engineering Safety Seminars



## Trade & Investment Mine Safety

Dates and venues for the annual mechanical and electrical engineering Mine Safety seminars have now been confirmed. **Note the change of venue for the electrical seminar.** This is information for your diary - registration information will be posted at a later date at:

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/resources/seminars-and-conferences](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/resources/seminars-and-conferences)

We recommend you book your accommodation early.

#### Mechanical Engineering Safety Seminar

*People, plant and mines – what is reasonably practicable?*

Wed & Thurs, 8-9 August 2012

Venue: **Waterview Convention Centre, Sydney Olympic Park**

#### Electrical Engineering Safety Seminar

Wed & Thurs, 7-8 November 2012

Venue: **Parkside Ballroom, Sydney Exhibition and Convention Centre, Darling Harbour**

## USA: Mine safety report gets rise in Capitol

### Democrats assail lapses cited in W. Va. tragedy

*Extract from The Boston Globe, USA*

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. - In light of a report on a deadly coal mine blast, some Democratic members of West Virginia's congressional delegation say it is time for Congress to stop delaying action on federal legislation that could help keep the nation's coal miners safe.

"A small group of my colleagues are blocking comprehensive mine safety reform for reasons that only they can explain," US Senator Jay Rockefeller said. "It's way past time for Congress to pass it and give our coal miners the protection they deserve and justice demands."

Rockefeller's remarks followed Tuesday's release of a report on the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration's handling of West Virginia's Upper Big Branch mine in the 18 months before a 2010 explosion there killed 29 men.

The internal review found that inspectors missed problems at the Massey Energy mine or did not examine areas where they existed. In failing to follow policies and procedures, they missed opportunities to launch six special investigations and to pursue "flagrant" violations. The report acknowledged failures by field staff but said their effectiveness was compromised by internal communication problems and US budget cuts that created staffing shortages, inexperience, and a lack of managerial oversight.

Although the US mining agency has made improvements the past two years, the report offered 20 pages of detailed, technical recommendations for regulatory and administrative changes.

**'The problems that have been detailed ... are appalling.'**

**Senator Jay Rockefeller**

"There is no question that the problems that have been detailed in this report are appalling," Rockefeller said. "This is plainly unacceptable. MSHA must address all the issues raised in this report and make sure such failures never happen again."

US Representative Nick Rahall agreed, saying the report depicts a severely flawed agency. Senator Joe Manchin, however, credited the agency with taking an in-depth look and publicly committing to change.

"You can't fix anything if you don't think you did anything wrong," he said, "and this report is a step in the right direction."

Rahall and Rockefeller want new legislation to give the mining agency more enforcement authority, increase criminal penalties, strengthen whistleblower protections, and require independent accident investigations.

The director, Joe Main, has said the agency also needs subpoena power in investigations.

Three bills are pending in Congress, including one crafted with help from the mining agency and sponsored by the senior Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee, US Representative George Miller.

Representative John Kline of Minnesota, a Republican who chairs that committee, said Tuesday he asked Main to attend a hearing on what he called "a disturbing failure of enforcement."

Miller, of California, however, said the entire system failed the West Virginia miners, "from Congress's failure to maintain adequate and experienced staffing at MSHA over the years, to the agency's failures to fully enforce the Mine Act, to the inherent weaknesses in that law, to a company hell-bent on exploiting all of those weaknesses."



## **S.Africa: 20 illegal miners killed in Grootvlei mine accident - Solidarity**

*Extract from [www.politicsweb.co.za](http://www.politicsweb.co.za)*

### **Grootvlei Mine turns into mass grave: Fatal accident claims lives of 20 illegal miners at Grootvlei**

Following the death of 20 illegal mineworkers this week, trade union Solidarity today made an urgent appeal to the liquidators of Pamodzi Gold to expedite the process of selling the assets of the Grootvlei mines, thereby making it possible to secure the mines as soon as possible and to put an end to illegal mining activities.

One illegal miner was seriously injured and (according to him) 20 killed in a rock fall as a result of illegal mining activities in a mine located between the Grootvlei and the Gravelotte mines on the East Rand, Witwatersrand field, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The number of illegal mineworkers killed in the accident has not been confirmed yet. Efforts to recover the bodies have been unsuccessful so far, as the area is too unstable to continue with recovery efforts. It appears the miners obtained access to the mine through Grootvlei's Van Rijn opencast mine.

According to Gideon du Plessis, Deputy General Secretary of Solidarity, this was yet another accident that can be attributed to Aurora's pillaging and negligence that led to the once imposing mineshaft of Grootvlei being razed to the ground. "These mines are turning into 'shafts of death'.

Until the assets are finally sold off, no one is going to take full responsibility to stop illegal mining activities at the mines, to secure the mineshafts adequately and to get them into operation again. Solidarity reiterates the appeal it made to the Department of Mineral Resources on 13 April 2011 at a portfolio committee meeting, to provide guidance in order to have the mines secured," says Du Plessis.

"AfriForum Youth planted 12 white crosses, representing a mass grave, at the Ndlovu shaft last year in memory of the Aurora employees and illegal miners who had died as a result of Aurora's looting and negligence. It was a symbolic grave, but the shaft has now literally turned into a mass grave," he adds.

*Statement issued by Gideon du Plessis, Deputy General Secretary: Solidarity, March 8 2012*

Friday 9 March 2012

## **Crandall Canyon: Fines don't satisfy families of mine disaster victims**

*Extract from The Salt Lake Tribune, USA*

### **Crandall Canyon: They say \$500K fine, ending 4-year probe, is a 'disgrace' to victims.**

Loved ones of Crandall Canyon mine disaster victims reacted with indignation and frustration Friday as a four-year criminal probe into the catastrophic 2007 collapse ended with only minor charges.

"There's really not much justice, even though they have to pay whatever amount of money they have to pay," said Frank Allred, whose brother Kerry was one of nine men who died in a pair of implosions at the Emery County coal mine in August 2007.

Allred was referring to U.S. Attorney for Utah David Barlow's announcement that a settlement was reached in which Crandall Canyon's co-owner and operator, Genwal Resources, Inc., will plead guilty to two misdemeanors for willfully violating safety laws in the mine and will pay the maximum fine of \$500,000.

Neither violation contributed directly to the initial collapse of the mine's walls on Aug. 6, burying a six-member crew that included Kerry Allred (three rescuers died and six more were injured in a second implosion 10 days later).

Instead, the first criminal count stemmed from the company's failure to quickly report a devastating March 10, 2007, implosion that did not injure anyone but stopped mining in a section relatively close to where the fatalities occurred five months later.

#### At a glance

##### The violations

**Fine: \$250,000** Murray Energy Corp. subsidiary Genwal Resources Inc. wilfully violated a mandatory health and safety standard by failing to report a March 10, 2007, implosion within 15 minutes of the accident.

**Fine: \$250,000** Genwal also violated its MSHA-approved roof control plan by cutting coal Aug. 3, 2007, in a "barrier pillar of coal" purposely left behind to shore up the mine's roof.

**What's next?** A U.S. District Court judge is scheduled to review the company's guilty plea and enact sentencing Wednesday at 3 p.m.

Source: U.S. attorney for Utah

##### Murray layoffs

Another Murray Energy subsidiary, UtahAmerican Energy Inc. "temporarily" laid off about half of its 320 employees Thursday at the West Ridge and Lila Canyon mines in Carbon County. A company statement said adverse underground mining conditions since October had reduced production, forcing the company to move major mining machinery to a different location. That move is expected to take three weeks. Employees then will return to work, it added.

The second count involved evidence that, just three days before the fatal collapse, the company mined into a "barrier pillar" of coal left behind to hold up the mine roof. Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) regulators had specifically prohibited mining of that pillar.

Barlow said that after four years of investigation, these were the transgressions his prosecutors could prove "beyond a reasonable doubt."

But in terms of the deadly collapse, which seismographs measured as a magnitude 3.9 earthquake, he added that "insufficient evidence" existed that could meet the burden of proof for criminal charges against individuals or corporate entities beyond Genwal Resources.

That would include mine general manager Laine Adair, who was singled out in a criminal investigation request by the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee, and Robert Murray, whose Ohio-based Murray Energy Corp. is the parent company of Genwal Resources. Murray Energy also has two other subsidiaries that operate coal mines in nearby Carbon County.

The settlement, which remains to be approved Wednesday by U.S. District Judge David Sam, stipulates that no charges will be filed against any other individuals or companies.

Cesar Sanchez, whose brother Manuel was with Erickson, said he was not surprised either because Murray "can buy anything and anybody. ... He just paid somebody to get it over with."

For Frank Allred, the settlement reflected the whole nature of the disaster, with family members repeatedly seeing their hopes dashed, first by the futility of the rescue operation, now in the search for justice.

"I would like to see something happen to Murray," Allred said. "He's an arrogant, egotistical sh--head. I would have liked to have seen more drastic measures taken to make sure the people who were involved, or helped cause this, were held responsible."

Lola Jensen lost her husband, MSHA inspector Gary Jensen, in the rescue effort. "Disappointment," she said with an air of resignation in describing her reaction to the charges. "We were a little hopeful that some justice would be served, especially when we waited this long. There's not much we can say. I guess it's over."

The news left Gayle McDonald in despair. "My thoughts are so negative now," said the sister of fatally injured rescuer Dale Black. "I can't believe what the [U.S. Attorney] did. We are emotional and at a loss for words. I wish that they had not done anything. It would have been better than this."

Added Black's widow, Wendy: "Did I expect any more? No. It was all just a song and dance to make it look like they were doing something. This is just a slap in everyone's faces."

Although Crandall Canyon was a non-union mine, Mike Dalpiaz of the United Mine Workers of America called the settlement an affront to all miners and a "disgrace to justice ... [The Justice Department] just told those families their loved one who is dead is worth just a few bucks."

The end of the criminal investigation does not mean the Crandall Canyon case is over.

MSHA's official disaster probe fined Genwal \$1.64 million for a series of mine-safety violations — primarily for inadequately designing the mine, weakening its structure more by mining coal that was off-limits and withholding information about earlier collapses that would have signaled potential danger to MSHA.

The company's engineering contractor, Agapito Associates, was fined an additional \$220,000.

## **USA: MSHA weakened air-flow plan before deadly UBB mine blast**

*Extract from Charleston Gazette, USA*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Before the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster, federal regulators approved a new mining plan for Massey Energy that significantly weakened ventilation requirements meant to control explosive methane and coal dust, members of an internal U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration review team have confirmed.

The new mining plan was approved in June 2009, and set up the methane- and dust-control standards Massey was to follow in a longwall mining section where the April 5, 2010, explosion that killed 29 miners occurred.

MSHA approved Massey's proposal to cut by more than half the fresh air the company was required to direct toward the working face of the longwall mining section at Upper Big Branch.

And compared to Upper Big Branch's previous longwall plan, approved three years earlier, the latest MSHA approval required fewer dust-control water sprays and weakened language for how those sprays would be operated.

Details of the MSHA action, contained in the agency's internal review report made public Monday, paint a more troubling picture than earlier information about the issue provided in April 2011 to the families of the miners who died in the worst U.S. coal-mining disaster in nearly 40 years.

The internal review not only makes it clear that MSHA took no steps to avoid a repeat of previous methane incidents at Upper Big Branch in 1997, 2003 and 2004, but also indicates agency officials approved a new longwall plan without bothering to first compare Massey's proposal to the previous requirements.

"When you think about what the ventilation plan is there to prevent, and then they do this, it is just incredible," said longtime mine safety advocate Davitt McAteer, who led an independent team that investigated Upper Big Branch and questioned MSHA's enforcement of safety standards at the operation.

Members of MSHA's internal review team concluded that none of the agency's missteps "caused the explosion," and top agency officials have promised a long list of reforms, including many measures they said they've already taken.

"MSHA is responsible for its actions and will address each of the problems the team has specifically identified," said Joe Main, assistant Labor secretary in charge of MSHA. "We take the deficiencies and recommendations outlined in this internal review extremely seriously."

Problems with MSHA's review of mine operator plans for ventilation and roof control at underground mines has been an issue over and over following previous mining disasters.

Internal reviews and other audits criticized MSHA's plan reviews following the deaths of 13 miners at the Jim Walter No. 5 Mine in

Brookwood, Ala., the deaths of two miners in a fire at Massey's Aracoma Mine in 2006, and the deaths of six miners and three rescuers in a mine collapse at Crandall Canyon, Utah, in 2007.

At Upper Big Branch, the longwall mining plan in question was put into place in late 2009, when Massey brought a longwall mining machine back after temporarily moving the machine to another one of its operations.

Shortly after the one-year anniversary of the fatal explosion, families of the Upper Big Branch miners were told that MSHA had discovered it approved a reduction in the required air flow to the longwall section's working face from 60,000 cubic feet per minute under the earlier plan to 40,000 cubic feet per minute in Massey's new proposal. At the time, MSHA confirmed that information, but declined to discuss the matter in more detail until the internal review was complete.

In a report released Tuesday, internal review team members said they had compared the earlier longwall plan from 2006 with the new one MSHA approved in June 2009. They found that MSHA had actually approved Massey's request to reduce the air-flow to the longwall face from 104,000 cubic feet per minute to 40,000 cubic feet per minute -- a far larger reduction that the disaster victims' families had been told. The 40,000 cubic feet per minute included in the approved plan is greater than the 30,000 cubic feet per minute minimum required by federal law. MSHA may require more ventilation if it is needed to protect miners at any specific operation.

The MSHA internal review report said the new longwall plan at Upper Big Branch "was significantly less stringent," than the previous one, and said 40,000 cubic feet per minute of ventilation was "not sufficient to control respirable coal dust and mitigate methane outbursts at the mine." An appendix buried in the report listed at least 20 procedures that were "either relaxed or omitted," including fewer water

sprays to control methane and dust and less specific mandates for how dust-control measures would work in the longwall section of the mine.

Internal review team members did not specifically say these changes had anything to do with the explosion, but MSHA's own investigation team said inadequate ventilation and insufficient water sprays on the longwall machine were major contributing factors in the disaster.

The internal review team said MSHA did not have procedures in place to ensure that previous mining plans -- let alone serious accidents -- were considered when new mining plan proposals were being reviewed by the agency.

The team's report also blamed turnover among the supervisors and technical staff at MSHA's district office in Southern West Virginia.

When the earlier longwall plan was reviewed, MSHA's district ventilation supervisor was Bill Ross. Ross left the agency in 2008, before the new plan was proposed, and took a job handling ventilation matters for Massey at Upper Big Branch and other local mines.

Internal review team members concluded that Ross' replacement at MSHA, Joe Mackowiak, was not aware of the previous methane incidents at Upper Big Branch when the new longwall plan was reviewed and approved.

The internal review report said that, after the explosion, documents about the earlier incidents "were not readily available" in MSHA files and were found packed in a box that Ross left behind when he went to work for Massey.

Ross asserted his Fifth Amendment right and refused to answer questions from disaster investigators. An MSHA lawyer blocked McAteer's internal review team from pursuing questions regarding what MSHA officials knew about the earlier methane incidents.



The internal review indicates that at least one local MSHA official, assistant district manager for technical programs Rich Kline, a 15-year-veteran of the agency, knew about the earlier methane incidents, and other MSHA records show Kline signed off on the new Upper Big Branch longwall plan.

MSHA records also show that Lincoln Selfe, a 20-year-MSHA veteran, signed off on the new longwall plan, as well.

Sunday 11 March 2012

## **USA: Nicholas Co. Miner Killed in Mining Accident**

*Extract from WSAZ-TV, USA*

SCARBORO, W.Va. - Friends and family are mourning the loss of a Nicholas County coal miner who lost his life in a mining accident in Raleigh County.

Family members say Jeremy Sigler was killed during an accident Saturday at the Kingston 1 Mine in Scarboro, West Virginia. The mine is owned by Alpha Natural Resources. According to a spokesperson with the Mine Safety and Health Administration, a foreman was killed when a rib rolled while he was running a continuous mining machine.

The spokesperson says MSHA district personnel are now investigating the accident. The mine has now been closed for the time being, and no one is allowed underground

Tuesday 13 March 2012

## **S.Africa: Two miners killed at Harmony mine**

*Extract from Business Report, South Africa*

Two mineworkers were killed in an accident at Harmony Gold Mining Company's Kusasalethu mine near Carletonville yesterday, the group said on Tuesday, but it gave no indication of the nature of the accident.

Investigations into the cause of the accident were underway, it said in a brief statement.

"Harmony's Chief Executive, Graham Briggs and his management team, express their sincere condolences to the families of the deceased and those affected by the incident," the statement said



File photo: REUTERS

## **USA: Investigation continues in fatal Nicholas mine mishap**

*Extract from The Register-Herald.com*

Investigators are still working to determine how a Nicholas County coal miner was killed Saturday, according to a release from Alpha Natural Resources.

Jeremy Chad Sigler, 34, of Pool, suffered fatal injuries involving a rib roll at the Kingston No. 2 underground mine in Fayette County.

He was struck by material from the mine's side wall during Saturday's evening shift. Members of the section crew administered CPR before transporting him outside. Sigler was then taken by ambulance to Raleigh General Hospital where he was later pronounced dead.

Sigler had approximately 10 years of underground mining experience. He had been employed by Kingston Mining since 2004.

The mine, a subsidiary of Alpha Natural Resources, is under a closure order while federal and state officials continue their

investigation of the accident with the support of mine personnel.

The release says Kingston Mining is fully cooperating with the investigation.

"In this sad time our prayers and heartfelt condolences go to Mr. Sigler's family," Charlie Bearnse, president of Kingston Mining, said. "While the mine is idled we will work closely with the outside investigators to determine how and why the accident occurred. We are administering to his family's needs and providing counseling to his fellow miners at this time to help them deal with the loss of their coworker."

## Teen tells of mineshaft hell

*Extract from [www.news24.com](http://www.news24.com)*

Johannesburg - He had hoped to make some quick money to send back to his family in Zimbabwe, but now 17-year-old Themba Mlambo realises that illegal mining is too dangerous a game for him.

The Zimbabwean teenager was one of a few illegal miners to survive the accident at an unused mineshaft near Grootvlei mine near Springs last Monday, The Star reported on Tuesday.

The tunnel to the mine will be sealed off and the bodies of at least 20 people will be left underground because rescuers decided that it was too dangerous to attempt retrieving the bodies. It is uncertain, though, how many went down the mine.

Earlier this year, Mlambo had left his carpentry job for Shaft 13 because he had heard that he would make some quick cash.

"I would always see other guys boasting about the money they made there. They would say they made between R5 000 and R7 000 in two days," he said as he lay on his hospital bed.

### 'Rocks are falling!'

On his first day in the mine last month, Mlambo made R600.

The shaft they entered had been sealed shut, but he said "grenades" were used to blast it open.

When Mlambo went underground last Monday with a group of about 30 people, they were equipped with food, tools and batteries for torches. Some of the group were as young as 14, he told The Star.

They had been underground for just a few hours when someone screamed down the dark shaft: "Rocks are falling, rocks are falling!"

Then rocks began to tumble around Mlambo. "The top of the mine was vibrating. Suddenly everyone started to run, screaming and being hit by rocks.

"I was running when I tripped and fell. Then a rock hit me on my back, it was so big that I could not stand up, I was trapped under it."

Around him lay dead miners.

### Syndicates

Two fellow illegal miners, also rushing to escape the rockfall, came across Mlambo and pulled him from under the rock and carried him to safety outside.

Normally, when the miners returned to the surface, people would be waiting at the entrance to buy the gold.

Frans Baleni, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, told The Star illegal mining was fuelled by big syndicates who were in cahoots with some mine managers. He said the syndicates would bribe mine managers to provide information about where gold could be found in abandoned shafts.

The shafts would initially have been shut down after management had decided that they would be too costly to mine.

Wednesday 14 March 2012

## **Feds: Idaho's Lucky Friday Mine missed safety check before rock burst**

*Extract from Idaho Press-Tribune, USA*

SPOKANE, Wash. — A federal inspection report shows that officials at the Lucky Friday Mine in northern Idaho failed to conduct the second of two daily monitoring checks on the day a violent rock burst broke the pelvis of one miner and also injured six others.

The report is part of a collection of more than 300 pages of inspection documents the Spokesman-Review obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.



AP Photo/Nick Geranios, File

In November, the Mine Safety and Health Administration ordered managers at the underground silver mine in Mullan to perform twice-daily monitoring of stress in rocks in mine shafts. The federal agency demanded the checks after a Nov. 16 rock burst that registered as a 2.8-magnitude quake on seismographs. That burst didn't cause any injuries.

A second rock burst was reported Dec. 14, this time causing the injuries to seven miners.

A MSHA inspector reported that managers at the mine, operated by Hecla Mining Co., failed to conduct the second daily stress reading, according to documents obtained by the

newspaper. The rock burst occurred later that evening.

"The company disregarded the safety of the miners by failing to do the required testing," a federal inspector wrote in his report.

Hecla is appealing the inspector's conclusion, and a company spokeswoman declined to comment.

According to the documents, mine superintendent Jeff Jordan told inspectors that he didn't think rock stress readings could be taken because workers were installing a steel liner over stress gauges in that area. But the gauges contained extended wires so they could be read during the installation of the liner, which was intended to contain unstable rock, the documents said.

The inspection reports also offer more details about the December inspection that led to a yearlong shutdown of the Lucky Friday during a period of record silver prices. Federal inspectors closed the primary shaft on Jan. 6, citing safety concerns.

Hecla officials expect the mine to reopen in early 2013, after repairs are made to the shaft, which carries workers and ore into and out of the mine.

Among other findings detailed in the documents:

— Inspectors said loose concrete deposits in the mile-deep shaft were a hazard, with the potential to fall and injure or kill workers travelling in the shaft. The deposits were the result of leaking pipes that carry sand and cement into the mine. Some concrete chunks were as large as 2 feet by 3 feet.

— The weekly shaft inspections performed by Hecla employees were inadequate, federal inspectors said. The mine didn't have systematic procedures for testing or inspecting the shaft or keeping up with shaft maintenance, the reports said.

— Several work areas didn't have a secondary escape route. Inspectors said miners could be trapped underground if their only escape route was blocked by falling rock.

— Inspectors cited numerous areas where mesh fencing to contain unstable rock had holes torn in it. The Lucky Friday was cited more than 40 times for the same problem in the past two years, the reports said.

— In one area, inspectors snapped pictures of a portable toilet located directly underneath an overhead chute.

— About 70 pages of inspection documents were withheld because they're related to an ongoing investigation of arson fires at the mine last summer.

Hecla plans to spend \$50 million on capital projects at Lucky Friday over the next year, including \$30 million for shaft repairs and upgrades. The Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, company's goal is to surpass the federal safety requirements and operate as safely and efficiently as possible, Hecla spokeswoman Melanie Hennessey said in an interview last week.

Since a fatal accident at the mine in April 2011, Hecla has added geotechnical engineering staff at both the Lucky Friday Mine and the Greenscreek Mine in Alaska, she said. There was another fatal accident at Lucky Friday in November.

## **USA: 'Outraged' Utah judge OKs settlement of Crandall mine case**

*Extract from Salt Lake Tribune, USA*

U.S. District Judge David Sam said Wednesday he felt "outrage" that a Murray Energy Corp. subsidiary will pay only \$500,000 to settle a criminal case stemming from the 2007 Crandall

Canyon mine disaster that claimed the lives of nine Utahns.

But he accepted the U.S. Attorney for Utah's argument that two misdemeanor counts of violating mine safety laws were the most serious charges that could be brought against the company, given the way the law is written.

In approving a settlement in the 4-year-old case, Sam imposed the maximum fine possible on Murray Energy subsidiary Genwal Resources Inc. But the penalties did nothing to ease the bitterness felt by victims' family members, who believe the parent company and its owner, Robert Murray, got off easy and considered him combative to the end.

The victims' survivors were particularly incensed by a statement issued by Murray Energy after the settlement was announced Friday. That statement indicated the company had been vindicated, "reflect[ing] the lack of evidence that any conduct by the company caused the accidents of Aug. 6 or 16."

On Aug. 6, 2007, a six-man crew was buried deep in the Emery County mine when its walls imploded while they were working. Ten days later, a second implosion killed three rescuers and injured six others, forever ending the underground search for the missing miners.

Ed Havas, a Salt Lake City attorney who helped represent many victims' relatives in a wrongful death and injury civil lawsuit resolved in 2009, told Judge Sam the company's denial of responsibility was "hurtful to the families. Genwal bypassed an opportunity to say 'sorry,' which should have been said long ago."

Kristin Kimber Cox, whose ex-husband, Brandon, was one of the three rescuers killed, said Wednesday that an apology "would be a sense of acknowledgement [of responsibility]. It wouldn't make the pain go away, but at least it would show that this man [Murray] is semi-remorseful."



Stewart Walz, a prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office, said the public has a right to believe that "serious consequences demand more serious charges," but that the evidence was insufficient to support additional criminal allegations that could be proven at trial.

Said Sam: "My initial take is outrage at the minuscule amount of the penalty provided by the federal statute." He said he reviewed the options available to prosecutors if he rejected the plea deal, but concluded that course of action only would prolong the "sorrow and grief" without any better results.

"I'm satisfied the U.S. attorney did a very thorough and complete of a review as can be conducted," the judge said.

Thursday 15 March 2012

## **Three trapped in central China mine**

*Extract from Xinhua*

CHANGSHA - Three people were trapped following a flooding underground a coal mine in central China's Hunan Province Thursday, local authorities said.

The accident occurred at about 10:50 am when 39 miners were working underground the Shanqiao Coal Mine in Hengyang county, the county government said in a statement.

Thirty-six mine workers managed to escape and the rest three remained trapped. Rescuers said they had heard sound of knocking underground the shaft, indicating the trapped workers might still be alive.

The rescue operation is still under way.

Friday 16 March 2012

## **NSW: Miner loses fingers in Dendrobium accident**

*Extract from ABC News Online, Aus*

An investigation is underway into an accident at an Illawarra underground coal mine where a worker lost three fingers.

The accident happened at BHP Billiton Illawarra Coal's Dendrobium mine at Mount Kembla last month.

A coal tram driver lost his ring and pinky fingers, and thumb, when his hand became caught between the tram and the mine wall.

The employee in his 40s required hospital treatment and is now recovering at home.

BHP Billiton Illawarra Coal, the New South Wales Department of Trade and Investment and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union are investigating the accident.

A company spokeswoman says any improvements identified in the investigation will be implemented.

The Department of Trade and Investment is interviewing witnesses.

## **East China iron mine accident kills 13**

*Extract from ChinaDaily.com.au*

JINAN - Thirteen people had been confirmed dead after a mining capsule fell out of control into a pit at an iron ore mine in Shandong province Thursday, local authorities said.

The accident happened at 1 am at the Shimen Iron Ore Mine in Lucheng township, Cangshan county of the city of Linyi. As of 7 pm Thursday, searching job had been completed and 13 people were confirmed dead, said an official of the provincial government.

Initial investigation showed that the capsule fell down as the steel rope broke, the official said.

The provincial government had set up an investigation team and further investigation into the accident is underway.

The privately-run Shimen Iron Ore Mine belongs to the Jinan Iron and Steel Group.

Sunday 18 March 2012

## Poland: Foreman crushed in Silesian mine collapse

*Extract from PolskieRadio, Poland*

A 45-year-old mining foreman has died at the "Marcel" mine in Radlin, Upper Silesia, after the mine's ceiling collapsed and crushed the man against a combine.

According to the Silesia Province Crisis Management Centre in Katowice, the accident took place on Saturday afternoon at a depth of 400 metres.

Regional mining authorities are looking into the causes of the disaster.

The "Marcel" mine belongs to the Kompania Weglowa, the largest mining company both in Poland and Europe.

This is the second reported fatality to occur at the mine since the beginning of the month.

On 9 March tremors took place some 850 metres below the surface in the vicinity of 18 miners, one of whom died in hospital soon afterwards, with a number remaining injured.

## This week in mining accident history

<p><b>18 March 1979</b> <b>Golborne Colliery</b> <b>Wigan, Lancashire, UK</b> <b>Underground coal mine, 3 killed by explosion</b></p>
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Three men have been killed in an underground explosion at Golborne colliery, near Wigan in Lancashire.



Golborne colliery has one of the best safety records in the industry

Eight others were seriously injured when a fireball shot 200 yards(183m) along a tunnel, which was 1,800ft (549m) underground.

The injured were taken to local hospitals in the area with serious burns and lung injuries.

It is believed the blast was caused when a build-up of methane gas caught light but it is not clear what caused the gas to ignite.

### 'Terrible tragedy'

Another 100 men working at the pit at the time of the explosion, which occurred at about 1130 hours today, were taken to safety.

Many joined the rescue efforts. One of them, Frank Gormley, son of the president of the National Union of Miners (NUM), Joe Gormley, drove a train to the seam face to help carry the dead and injured out of the mine.

Arrangements were being made to transport the injured, some of whom had burns on 90% of their bodies, from local hospitals to the burns unit at Withington hospital in Manchester.

Ambulance workers at Hindley and Wigan broke their strike to take the injured to hospitals.

Following the explosion, Energy Secretary, Tony Benn, MP, visited the scene with the local Labour MP, John Evans.

He said: "It is the most terrible tragedy

"I have come to express sympathy with the families. The human cost of coal is still a very high cost and we must never take it for granted."

Golborne colliery has one of the best safety records in the industry.

But methane is a gas which occurs naturally underground and is feared by miners. The victims in this case were all carrying methane-detecting equipment.

Julian Griffiths, deputy director of the National Coal Board's western area, said: "The men were equipped with methanometers and safety lamps.

"Three electricians were reconnecting an electrical supply. The others were believed to be transporting ventilation plant and other equipment.

"Work has been going on developing that section for two years."

The dead were named as John McKenna, 37, from Bryn near Wigan, Colin Dallimore, 29, from Wigan and Joe Berry, 41, from Leigh.

#### In context

By 2 April the number of dead had risen to 10. There was just one survivor, 20-year-old apprentice electrician, Brian Rawsthorne from Garswood in Lancashire.

Desmond Edwards, 44, died on 21 March. The following day the incident claimed Patrick Graine, 40. His brother, Peter Graine, 41, died the day after that. By 2 April all but one of the injured men had died. They were Brian Sherman, 23, Bernard Trimble, 34, Raymond Hill, 33 and Mr Walter McPherson, 45. They all died from injuries sustained in the blast.

Two days after the explosion it emerged that bosses at the pit knew of a ventilation fan that was out of order.

This caused methane levels to build up at a much faster rate than normal.

Yorkshire miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, said the Coal Board incentive bonus scheme had led

to a "staggering increase" in the number of deaths in British pits.

An inquest held in October 1979 returned verdicts of death by misadventure on the victims.

Brian Rawsthorne was able to provide an account of the accident and it was revealed the blast occurred when electrician Colin Dallimore, who had been working on a bank of switches, tested the circuit, causing a "spark and a bang".

Mr Rawsthorne told the inquest he was catapulted backwards by the force of the explosion.

In the days following the tragedy, the Mayor of Wigan launched an appeal fund for the dependents of the miners who died. A total of £30,000 was raised.

## Mining dictionary

### A guide to coal mining terminology

#### B

#### Belt idler

A roller, usually of cylindrical shape, which is supported on a frame and which, in turn, supports or guides a conveyor belt. Idlers are not powered but turn by contact with the moving belt.



Belt idler (shown red)

-Ed