



Mining Accident News No.1207

19 to 31 March 2012

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Monday 19 March 2012

Serbia: Young miner dies in coal mine accident

Extract from www.b92.net, Serbia

Zaječar -- A 24-year-old miner died in late on Sunday in the Lubnica lignite mine, located near the town of Zaječar, in eastern Serbia.

According to reports, the victim was "literally crushed" by a mechanism used to as part of a conveyor belt that carries the coal.

A local court has order a post-mortem to be performed, while mining inspectors and police investigated the scene early this morning.

The deadly accident happened some 400 meters under ground. His colleagues said that the miner was alone in that part of the pit when he died, and speculated that he was trying to clean the area in front of a rotating drum when it "caught and pulled him in", crushing him to death.

This halted the conveyor belt, which was a signal to others that something was amiss, said reports.

The Belgrade-based Blic tabloid also writes today the miner who found the victim "almost fainted at the sight".

"Under the metal drum, which crushes even the hardest rocks and powers the conveyor belt, was the unrecognizable body of our colleague. The drum literally sucked him in and ground him," the miners recounted the grisly details.

Qld: Experts probe mine digger fall

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Queensland Mines Inspectorate is preparing a report on how an excavating digger fell onto its side at Xstrata Zinc's Black Star

open-cut mine at Mount Isa, in the state's north-west, last week.

The Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) says no-one was injured in the accident.

A DEEDI spokesman says it appears earth underneath the digger gave way, causing it to topple.

In a statement, DEEDI says the accident happened late on Tuesday night.

It says the digger was removing surface material for a drainage project, when earth material under its right track gave way.

Qld: Union outraged over miners' toxic gas exposure

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) says it has serious concerns for the health of workers at a north Queensland coal mine, after a series of incidents involving toxic gases.

Last week, 14 miners were treated after being exposed to gases at the Collinsville open-cut mine, north-west of Mackay.

It is the fifth gas-related incident in a month.

CFMEU spokesman Steve Smyth says too many lives are being put at risk.

"You can have an incident happen here or an incident happen there, but when you continue to have them - and what I understand is they have in excess of 30 people now have been taken to hospital to seek treatment - one is one too many, but 30 is just outrageous," he said.

Tuesday 20 March 2012

USA: Mine Accident Kills One Employee near Brilliant, Ohio

Extract from WTRF.com

BRILLIANT, Ohio - OhioAmerican Energy, Inc identified an employee who was fatally injured

on Saturday, March 17,in an accident at the company's Redbird West surface and Highwall mining complex near Brilliant, Ohio.

The victim has been identified as Walter Ralph McAfee,55.

Company officials said the accident occurred when McAfee was pinned between two pieces of equipment.

Ohio American in a press release said that as coordinator of Highwall Miner Operations at the Redbird West operation, McAfee was a highly respected and valued six and a half year employee of OhioAmerican.

The company has expressed condolences to McAfee's family and friends.

The accident is still under investigation by OhioAmerican, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration and the Ohio Division of Mine Safety.

Opened in mid-2007, the mine uses a specialized system to remove coal from the highwall of an older strip mine, as well as regular surface mining methods.

USA: Great Falls Yogo mine owner killed in mining accident

Extract from greatfallstribune.com

A Great Falls man who was the owner of a Yogo sapphire mine near Utica was killed in a mining accident sometime Monday night or early Tuesday morning, according to the Judith Basin County Coroner's Office.

Deputy Coroner Dick Brown said Michael Duane Roberts, 54, was found dead in the mine after a friend went to check on him. The accident was reported at about 3:40 a.m. Tuesday. Brown said the cause of death is still being investigated, but falling rocks may have contributed to the accident.

According to a previous Tribune article, Roberts bought the Vortex mine in 2008, running it as one of the last commercially viable Yogo sapphire mines in the region.

Brown said the exact time of the death is unknown, and that Roberts was the only person in the mine when the accident occurred.

S.Africa: Section 54 safety stoppage issue dominates Shabangu media conference

Extract from miningweekly.com

PRETORIA – The issue of Section 54 mine safety stoppages and their unintended potentially hazardous consequences dominated a Minerals Ministry media conference here on Tuesday.

In a case that the JSE-listed Northam Platinum brought against the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) on the stoppage issue, the Labour Court has given the (DMR) until March 27 to review Section 54 of the Health and Safety Act, which the department stands accused of implementing in a dangerously heavyhanded manner.

AngloGold Ashanti chairperson and former South African Reserve Bank governor and Cabinet Minister Tito Mboweni earlier this year said the DMR had adopted a “sledgehammer” approach with Section 54 and he accused the department of “regulating the industry to death”.

Minerals Minister Susan Shabangu told the conference in response to a question from *Mining Weekly Online* that the DMR would be responding to the court on the matter, but regretted that Northam had informed the DMR of the pending legal proceedings by SMS on a Saturday.

“If you have a partner – because we believe that the mining sector is our partner – that goes to court on a Saturday and sends you an SMS that it is going to court at 10:00 on the following Monday, it does raise issues of relations,” Shabangu commented.

On Section 54 stoppages standing accused of costing the South African economy \$500-million by losing 300 000 nonfatal precious metal ounces of production, Shabangu challenged

South Africa to cease equating safety with money.

She said that while in her view Section 54 had had the desired results in terms of improving health and safety, she acknowledged that concerns had been voiced by the mining industry regarding its implementation.

Section 54 was never intended to be hazardous and had been endorsed by government, business and labour as no legislation was passed without the involvement of the mining industry.

The DMR, business and labour had established a task team under mining industry growth, development and employment organisation Migdett to investigate those concerns. National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) president Senzeni Zokwana said that the mining industry had shift overseers that were tasked with the job of seeing to safety.

Zokwana said that safety personnel were thus available, but what was needed was coordination between the DMR and company safety officers to ensure that conditions were made safe.

DMR chief inspector of mines David Msiza, who with DMR director-general Dr Thibedi Ramontja flanked the Minister, said the department would work through Migdett and the mine health and safety council to improve Section 54’s implementation, where necessary.

The 2011 overall 3% safety improvement in South Africa’s mines was juxtaposed against some of the most devastating mine disasters of the past, including the Coalbrook mine disaster near Vereeniging in 1960 when 435 mainly black coal miners were permanently entombed in one day and 732 miners had died in mine incidents the year before, in 1959.

This compared with 12 miners dying tragically in South African coal mines and 123 dying in all in 2011.

Prior to South Africa's democracy in 1994, the mining industry reported no less than 500 fatalities a year.

"But one death is one too many," Shabangu reiterated.

The 2011 statistic translated to a marginal improvement of 3% year-on-year and there had been an 8% improvement, from 0.12 to 0.11, in the fatality frequency rates per million hours worked between 2010 and 2011.

Fifty-one died in gold mines in 2011, 37 in platinum mines, 12 in coal mines and 23 in diamond, chrome, copper, iron-ore and other mines.

Latest figures for the period January 1 to March 12 show 19% fewer deaths, from 27 in 2011 to 22 in 2012.

The number of mine injuries has fallen 40% from 667 in 2011 to 403 in 2012.

"This is not about the improvement in the statistics, however important that may be but about the fundamental right to life that the mine workers deserve.

"Despite the marginal improvement, South Africa continues to have unacceptably high fatalities in the mining industry," Shabangu added.

While the gold sector had improved by 18%, from 62 fatalities in 2010 to 51 in 2011, it was regrettable that the same could not be said of the platinum industry where there had been a regression from 34 fatalities in 2010 to 37 in 2011.

The figures indicated that there had been a concerted effort by gold miners to ensure that safety was a top priority.

She believed that the gold sector was on the way to meeting its zero-fatalities-by-2013 commitment.

"It shows that the gold miners really take the issues of health and safety to heart," Shabangu added.

Although falls of ground mine related deaths had reduced by 19% from 47 in 2010 to 38 in 2011, this remained the major contributor to fatalities followed by transport and mining at 37 deaths reported in 2011.

For the first time in five years, there had not been a mine disaster accident – a single event that resulted in the deaths of four or more employees – in 2011.

The number of mine injuries had reduced by 15% from 3 436 in 2010 to 2 918 in 2011.

Also, the lack of significant improvement regarding the health issues, mainly noise induced hearing loss and silicosis diseases, which further predisposed miners to tuberculosis (TB), was of major concern, with HIV/AIDS increasing the incidence of TB substantially.

There had been 4 500 cases of pulmonary Tuberculosis reported by the mines in 2010 and this had not improved from the previous reporting period.

The total number of noise induced hearing loss cases reported in 2010 were 1 200 and silicosis occupational diseases 1 700.

Ministerial group audits, commenced during the 2011 festive season, would continue until June, focusing on rock fall, rock burst and transport equipment accidents.

The purpose of the audits is also to evaluate mine management systems for preventing exposure of employees to noise and dust, including silica dust, which could result in workers suffering from noise-induced hearing loss and silicosis.

Thursday 22 March 2012

5 dead, 17 trapped after China coal mine blast

Extract from Xinhua

BEIJING - A gas explosion ripped through a coal mine in Northeast China's Liaoning province Thursday, killing at least five people and

trapping 17 others, the national work safety watchdog said.

A total of 23 miners were working underground at the Dahuang No 2 Coal Mine in Liaoyang city when the accident happened at noon, the State Administration of Work Safety announced in a statement.

One of them has managed to escape, and rescuers are struggling to the search for the trapped people, it said.

No further details were provided.

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

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**

Friday 23 March 2012

South Africa: TB - Miners Hardest Hit

Extract from allAfrica.com

Musa Ernest Nkoko is a 52-year old ex-miner with multi-drug resistant (MDR) tuberculosis. He

lives in KaShoba in the Lubombo region of Swaziland with his wife and five children aged between 9 and 27 years.

Co-infected with HIV, Nkoko says he has been on treatment for MDR-TB for the last four years. The disease has diminished Nkoko's lung capacity and rendered him too weak to do any work, and he and his family relies on his wife's income as a part time cleaner.

In the early 1980s, Nkoko boarded a train to South Africa to work in the mines. He was employed as a general labourer in the old Vaal Reef gold mine, now known as Anglo Ashanti Gold.

After nearly 16 years of working in the stopes - the frontline where the actual gold reef is mined - Nkoko developed lung problems, and shortly after he was retrenched and repatriated to Swaziland.

Since his return home, Nkoko suffered with lung problems that made it difficult for him to find and retain work to provide for his family. Eventually he was diagnosed with MDR-TB in 2008 and has been on treatment ever since.

Apart from the normal retrenchment package owed to workers, Nkoko hasn't received any compensation or support from the mine for the lung disease he contracted during his time there.

Why miners are at an increased risk (Silicosis and HIV)

Mineworkers in South Africa are believed to be the population worst affected by TB in the world. According to the Chamber of Mines, 2 984 of every 100 000 mineworkers develop TB, although others believe the numbers to be as high as 7 000 per 100 000.

To put the numbers into perspective, in Swaziland - which is considered to have the highest TB-infection rate in the world by the World Health Organisation - only 1 200 per 100 000 population is infected.

There are various explanations for the high rate of infection among mineworkers. The most important of these is HIV, which makes a person more susceptible to developing TB. Mineworkers are at a higher-than-normal risk for acquiring HIV due to the fact that they are often separated from their wives and families and may therefore partake in risky sexual activities.

A second big risk factor adding to the high rate of TB among miners is silicosis. This lung disease is caused by the inhalation of silica dust, which is commonly expelled during gold mining processes.

Silica damages the lungs' defence mechanisms, increasing the risk of TB infection 10-fold. Silicosis is irreversible and a person is at heightened risk of TB for the rest of lives, even after leaving the mines.

Another important factors adding to mineworkers' increased risk for TB is the migration patterns of mineworkers. Treatment for TB and other diseases are often interrupted or stopped when migrant mineworkers leave South Africa to return home to neighbouring countries.

"There is believed to be as much as US\$2.5 trillion under the ground [in mineral wealth] in South Africa - which is good news for the country's economy, but bad news for mineworkers," said Joel Spicer of the Stop TB partnership at a recent media briefing. The "bad news" he was referring to is the high rate at which mineworkers are suffering and dying from TB, a preventable and curable diseases.

"Fatalities from TB in mines are much higher than those of mine accidents, yet the media gives much more coverage to mine accidents," said Dr David Mametja from the National TB Programme in South Africa.

Peter Baily from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) concurred, saying that for

every one fatal accident, five mineworkers die from occupational disease.

Professor Jill Murray of the National Institute of Occupational Health pointed out that although all accidents in mines are investigated, there are no enquiries into TB deaths, which far outnumber accidental deaths, "although, it is provided for in the [Occupational Health] Act".

Although there are regulations in place to manage silica dust exposure among mineworkers, few mines uphold the necessary standards as the regulations are not enforced. "And if one considers the state-of-the-art machinery used to mine for gold, the mining companies should really be doing a lot more to control silica dust exposure," said Murray.

Mametja pointed out that TB among the mining population is about more than just the individual's health - it also affects the health of the mineworkers' family and community, often crossing international borders.

According to a position paper by the South African Department of Health, the migrant workers employed in South African mines have established a pattern of "oscillating migration", where they move between urban and rural areas and across borders. As a result, the TB acquired in the mines has the potential to fuel TB transmission in the workers' home region.

Oscillating migration in South African mines has been shown to perpetuate the TB epidemic in Lesotho. A recent study showed that close to 40% of adult male TB patients in three of Maseru's main hospitals were working, or had formerly worked, on South African mines. Furthermore, at least 25% of drug-resistant TB cases treated in Lesotho since August 2007 had a history of work in the mines or were referred directly from the mines in South Africa.

This "export" of TB from South African mines has led to efforts by the South African ministries of health and minerals to join forces with other

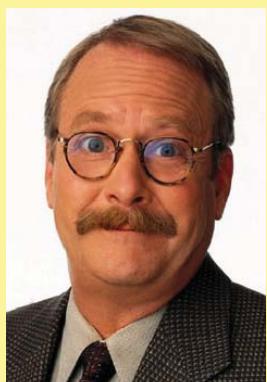
Southern Africa countries, especially Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique, to collaborate patient monitoring and treatment efforts in the region.

The South African government also recently showed its commitment to fighting TB when President Zuma's announced the goals of the National Strategic Plan on World Aids Day last year to achieve Zero TB and HIV deaths.

Furthermore the South African Ministry of Health is commemorating World TB Day on Saturday, 24 March, in a mine complex to highlight the severity of this issue among the population of mineworkers.

On the day the South African Ministry of Health is planning to launch a campaign to test and treat hundreds of thousands of miners for TB over the next year.

Quote of the week



"The trouble with jogging is that the ice falls out of your glass."

Martin Mull
American actor and comedian, 1943-

USA: Panel says MSHA likely could have prevented UBB disaster

Extract from the Charleston Gazette, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration likely could have prevented the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster if agency officials had properly enforced

ventilation standards and coal-dust limits, a new review by a government-sponsored panel has concluded.

A four-person panel appointed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reported that the disaster was not likely to have occurred if MSHA had not missed ventilation problems and a build-up of explosive coal dust.

The NIOSH panel found that even MSHA inspectors did not understand important mine safety rules and that top agency officials were unaware that MSHA missed inspections and overlooked violations as safety problems worsened at Upper Big Branch prior to the disaster.



President Barack Obama looks at a document spread across his desk during a meeting on mine safety with, from left, U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administrator Kevin Stricklin, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health Joe Main, Deputy Mine Safety and Health Administrator Greg Wagner, and Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis in the Oval Office April 15, 2010. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

"If MSHA had engaged in timely enforcement of the Mine Act and applicable standards and regulations, it would have lessened the chances -- and possibly could have prevented -- the UBB explosion," the NIOSH panel said in its 26-page report.

Twenty-nine miners died in the April 5, 2010, explosion at the Massey Energy mine in Raleigh County, ranking the incident as the worst U.S. coal-mining disaster in nearly 40 years.

The NIOSH panel report was provided to MSHA officials Thursday. The Gazette-Mail obtained a copy and posted it online Friday afternoon. By

early Friday evening, MSHA had posted a copy of it on its website, and issued a statement from MSHA chief Joe Main.

"MSHA is committed to rooting out and addressing critical issues within the agency head-on, and agrees more needs to be done to ensure full and effective enforcement of the Mine Act," Main said in the statement. "Under the Mine Act, Congress gave mine operators responsibility for running safe mines. Four investigations into the explosion all show that Massey Energy did not live up to that charge."

"Recent testimony confirmed that mine management routinely used illegal tactics to conceal violations from inspectors," the statement said. "MSHA cannot keep miners safe alone -- mine operators must commit themselves to safety and health."

House Education and the Workforce Chairman John Kline, R-Minn., said he intends to question Main about the NIOSH panel report during a committee hearing Tuesday in Washington.

"NIOSH presents yet another disturbing picture of MSHA's failure to enforce the law at Upper Big Branch," Kline said Friday evening. "Inspectors missed opportunities to address violations of the law and may have been able to prevent the disaster before it happened."

Just two weeks after the disaster, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis asked NIOSH Director John Howard to appoint a panel of experts to examine MSHA's internal review of agency enforcement actions at Upper Big Branch prior to the disaster. Solis said at the time that her goal was to ensure the "transparency and accountability" of MSHA's review of itself.

Howard appointed Jeffrey Koehler, director of NIOSH's mine-safety research programs, to lead the panel. Other members included retired NIOSH staffers Lewis Wade and Michael Sapko, and Stanford Law School professor Alison Morantz.

In its report, the MSHA internal review group repeated the agency's accident investigation

team's conclusion that serious, repeated and widespread safety violations by Massey's Performance Coal Co. subsidiary led to the disaster.

Report available at:

http://wvgazette.com/static/coal%20tattoo/UBB_NIOSH_PanelReport.pdf

China: Liaoning Mine Blast: Rescue Attempts Continue

Extract from Xinhua

Rescuers think they have identified the position of 17 miners trapped after a gas explosion hit a coal mine in northeast China's Liaoning province at noon on Thursday.

The miners are believed to have gathered at a work platform 169 meters underground, rescuers said.

The gas explosion ripped through the Dahuang No. 2 Coal Mine in Liaoyang city, killing at least five people and trapping 17 others.

A total of 23 miners were working underground at the time of the tragedy. One of them has managed to escape.

Concentrations of various gases in and around the mine have hindered rescue efforts. However, thanks to more than 10 hours of work by over 30 rescuers, the concentration of gas has declined from 20 percent to 15 percent, with carbon monoxide levels dropping to 0.0024 parts per million (ppm) from 0.01 ppm, said Liang Yongli, spokesman with the local rescue headquarters.

The bodies of the five victims were lifted out of the shaft early on Friday, Liang added.

The police have been looking for the owner of the coal mine, who ran away after the explosion.

Local safety authorities said that the mine's operations were supposed to be suspended

pending a safety-check, but that the owner had restarted operations illegally.

Sunday 25 March 2012

USA: Shuttle car operator killed in Drummond's Shoal Creek Mine

Extract from Birmingham News, USA

BIRMINGHAM, AL -- A shuttle car operator was killed Friday night in Drummond Mining Company's Shoal Creek Mine, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Preliminary information indicates that he contacted an energized trailing cable, causing electrocution.

An accident investigation has been started, MSHA said in a statement this afternoon.

The agency did not identify the miner. Efforts to reach company officials were unsuccessful.

A Walker County sheriff's department dispatcher said a deputy responded, but no further information was available.

The Shoal Creek Mine operation spans three counties: Jefferson, Walker and Tuscaloosa.

Monday 26 March 2012

US: Alabama man killed in mining accident named

Extract from Birmingham News, USA

BIRMINGHAM — Walker County officials have released the name of a man killed in a mining accident.

Walker County Coroner J.C. Poe told the Birmingham News that 37-year-old Harold Ennis died in the Friday night incident.

Poe told the newspaper that he received reports that Ennis was electrocuted. The Mine Safety and Health Administration is investigating.

Regulators say Ennis was a shuttle car operator in the Drummond Mining Company's Shoal Creek Mine. They say he contacted an energized cable which caused the electrocution.

China Blames Cover-up for Mining Rescue Delay

Extract from CriEnglish.com

A senior state work safety official on Monday blamed the cover-up of a Liaoning province coal mine accident and the flight of the mine boss for missing "the best time" to save 17 miners trapped underground after the incident.

Work crews on Monday were still pumping out poisonous gas that prevented rescuers from entering the Dahuang No. 2 Coal Mine in the city of Liaoyang, where a gas explosion last Thursday killed at least five miners and trapped 17 others.

Fu Jianhua, deputy director of the State Administration of Work Safety, who is supervising the rescue and investigation at the scene, said an initial probe shows the mine illegally re-opened after being ordered to shut for a safety overhaul.

"The mine failed to meet the safety requirements for operation," Fu said. "And the accident was initially covered up while the mine owner fled, resulting in a delay in the rescue."

Police earlier said they have detained the mine owner and another three managers.

Fu vowed to thoroughly investigate the case and severely punish the people found responsible.

He also ordered enhanced efforts to ventilate the carbon monoxide and other poisonous gas in the pit. Engineers said the mine's ventilation barely worked, pumping out only 80 cubic meters of gas per minute, far below the 1,000-cubic-meters-per-minute national standard for safe mining.

China's mines are among the deadliest in the world. Fatal accidents frequently occur in unlicensed mines eying huge profits in the sector. The State Administration of Work Safety reported that 1,973 miners were killed in coal mine accidents last year. The death toll, however, was 19 percent lower than the figure recorded in 2010.

Tuesday 27 March 2012

Suit filed in mine death

Extract from Ocala.com

The family of a man who went missing and was never found after a mysterious mining accident in Sumter County has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the mining company.

In 2010, Kenneth James Stephens, a 35-year-old supervisor at Austin Powder Co., had been contracted to conduct a blast at Mazak Mines off State Road 50 in Webster.



The entrance to the Mazak Mines site in Webster is shown in this Dec. 23, 2010 file photo. (Austin L. Miller)

Once the blast was complete, Stephens went to the area to make sure the blast was a success. The ground collapsed below him. He fell into a water-filled pit and none of his co-workers could see or hear him because he was covered by dirt. Officials from Austin Powder Co. said at the time that something like that had never happened on their watch.

A Sumter County Sheriff's Office dive team and helicopter searched for Stephens' body but couldn't find it. The search continued until April 2011, but was eventually called off.

Now the family has filed suit against Mid-Coast Aggregates, LLC, seeking more than \$15,000 in damages. The company had contracted to mine limestone at the mine with a private owner in 2005.

Mid-Coast hired Austin Powder Co. to conduct the blast and had planned to build a berm to pump water out of the area. Authorities at the time said the pit was between 50-100 feet deep.

The complaint, filed in Sumter County Court on March 19, says that Mid-Coast "learned that the geology of those lands included areas that rendered mining even more hazardous, so hazardous that Mid-Coast was forced to use extraordinary precautions to protect people involved and ultimately ceased mining in (the area) because of the danger."

The complaint states that the mining company knew the lands were too dangerous to mine and failed to notify workers of those conditions.

It contends that mining is an "inherently ultra-hazardous activity" in which the mining company and its manager are "strictly liable for personal injuries caused by the blasting injuries."

Ocala-based attorneys Daniel Hightower, Edwin C. Cluster and Wayne C. McCall are representing the family.

"Misty Stephens and her young children were devastated by the tragic death of her husband and their father," Hightower said in an email statement.

Stephens was originally from Beverly Hills in Citrus County and had been with Austin Powder Co. for 11 years. He left behind five children; the complaint states his family has suffered without his support since he died.

A representative from Mid-Coast declined to comment about the lawsuit. His attorney could not be reached for comment.

According to a report from the U.S. Department of Labor, Mine Safety and Health Administration, Mid-Coast is a small operation based in Webster

with a total of 16 employees and one plant manager.

The report states a large hole was found in the drilling pattern of the mine prior to the blast. But "neither mine nor contract management established any policies, procedures, or controls to ensure that persons could safely perform work at the blast site."

The report also concluded that "the accident occurred because mine and blasting contractor management policies, procedures, and controls were inadequate."

Wednesday 28 March 2012

USA: Fatal WV coal mine accident report released

Extract from The State Journal, W.Va, USA

The Mine Safety and Health Administration released the accident investigation report of the death of a West Virginia miner in June 2011.

In Bolt, Raleigh County, Joseph Cassell, was killed on June 27 after he was crushed by a mine roof fall of coal and rock. Cassell, 33, was cleaning the mine floor to install a wooden support timber when the incident occurred.

"The accident occurred because the rib bolts installed previously in the top portion of the rib were insufficient to stabilize the rib of the entry and prevent material from falling when the mine floor was being cleaned," the report states.

The accident happened at the Eagle No. 1 underground mine operated by Rhino Eastern LLC. The mine employs 88 underground miners and seven surface personnel.

The fatality followed MSHA sending a potential pattern of violation notice letter to the company in Nov. 19, 2010. The mine had been issued 14.44 substantial and serious violations per 100 inspection hours.

According to the report, at the time of the accident, MSHA was in the process of completing the quarterly safety and health inspection at the mine.

"Eric Beller, foreman, conducted a pre-shift examination for the MMU-004 mining section for the oncoming midnight shift, on Sunday, June 26, 2011," the report states. "Beller conducted the pre-shift examination between 8:15 and 8:39 p.m. and brought his report outside, prior to the midnight shift entering the mine. Beller briefed Cassell on the surface, informing him that the ribs needed to be addressed outby the power center."

Cassell and two other miners were working to clean up the damaged rib area when the collapse pinned Cassell. The other two miners narrowly escaped the debris themselves and began to assist Cassell.

He was pronounced dead at the mine.

The root causes were determined to be inadequate rib support and a practice of cleaning up fallen rib material under the exposure of dangerous conditions.

"A practice existed, which allowed miners to position themselves near hazardous overhanging broken ribs in order to install wooden posts," MSHA concludes. "the mine operator did not provide adequate guidance or oversight to an inexperienced crew, which was assigned to hazardous job tasks."

USA: MSHA looking for help to enforce mine safety

Extract from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WASHINGTON -- The Mine Safety and Health Administration is asking Congress to stiffen penalties for mine operators who provide employees advance notice of inspections to help them make quick fixes that conceal violations.

"There doesn't seem to be enough deterrents under the current Mine Act to keep that from happening," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health.

His comments came during a hearing of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on Tuesday. The hearing was convened to discuss what went wrong at Upper Big Branch Mine, where 29 West Virginia miners died in an April 2010 explosion.

Investigators found that Massey Energy, which operated the mine, had employees notify underground workers as soon as inspectors arrived. That gave them time to make superficial changes that concealed problems with air quality and coal dust accumulation that might have caused inspectors to shut down the mine and assess fines.

The practice is common in the industry, said Cecil E. Roberts, president of United Mine Workers of America, who also testified Tuesday. "Clearly, the existing penalties for advance notice are ineffective and should be increased to help effect compliance," he testified.

Current law allows for maximum penalties of \$1,000 in fines or six months in prison.

Inspectors were prevented from observing violations at Upper Big Branch because Massey Energy CEO Don Blankenship was able to exploit shortcomings in mine regulations without fear of harsh sanctions, Mr. Roberts said.

"He didn't want anybody to die, but he wasn't worried about it because the penalties were not severe enough," he said.

No one at Tuesday's hearing disagreed that Massey deserved the bulk of the blame for the tragedy, but some said Congress played a role, too, for failing to enact more stringent laws.

"We need to put out a little fear the government means business," said Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Mich.

Mr. Main said his agency needs more authority to enforce laws meant to keep miners safe. "We're using all the tools we have, but we can use a few more," he testified.

"We urge Congress to increase the penalties for egregious mine health and safety violations," Mr. Roberts testified. "What this committee and Congress does really matters to the coal miners of this nation."

Federal law lacks certification requirements for mine superintendents, subpoena power and whistle-blower protections, he said. The Mine Safety and Health Administration needs more authority to address mines with systemic problems, and prosecutors need stronger laws to hold mine operators accountable for criminal violations, he said.

NZ: Pike River submissions near end

Extract from www.stuff.co.nz

Final submissions on the fatal explosion at Pike River mine are to be heard next week.

The royal commission of inquiry into the explosion that claimed the lives of 29 men is reaching the latter stages, but will hear 37 final submissions about what happened, before it resumes considering mining policies in the final phase.

The commission, chaired by Justice Graham Pankhurst, will resume on Monday, when three days have been set aside to hear the final submissions.

Representatives of 15 participants will speak to the submissions, but no witnesses would be called, a spokeswoman for the commission said.

Phase three of the inquiry, which looked into what happened underground in the West Coast mine, was carried out over 22 days spanning November and December last year, as well as February this year. The last eight days of that phase focused on what was believed to have actually caused the blast.

They followed five weeks of phase one and two hearings in July and September.

So far, the court has heard how a roof collapse in the mine's hydro-mining goaf - a void left when coal is extracted - was the cause of the explosion.

Two Australian experts told the court the roof collapse pushed an accumulation of explosive methane gas around the mine, which was then ignited by an electric spark when the water pumps were switched on.

They also said the mine's ventilation and gas monitoring systems had serious faults.

The first two phases focused on New Zealand's regulatory laws and the search and rescue and recovery missions.

Justice Pankhurst has previously told the court phase four's focus would be looking into the future.

"From now on, there will be less emphasis on looking back, the immediate cause of the explosion and the systematic issues, which may have contributed to its occurrence; in favour of a more forward-looking focus. Really . . . the most crucial aspect for the report will be recommendations for the future."

It is expected recommendations would come out of phase four deliberations into New Zealand's mining laws compared to policies overseas, which would have implications for not just the mining governing bodies, but also the Government and every mining company operating in New Zealand.

The report detailing the commission's findings is due to be received by the Governor General on September 28.

Thursday 29 March 2012

NZ: Pike River splinter group launches protest

Extract from Otago Daily Times, NZ

A small group of Pike River families have hung a large banner from the Cobden Bridge as they launched their own protest over the lack of progress in recovering their loved ones' bodies.

Anna Osborne, whose husband Milton died in the mine explosion 16 months ago, is infuriated by the lack of progress.

Mrs Osborne said the sign on the bridge and another outside National Party MP Chris Auchinvole's office were part of a quiet protest that was the "start of things to come".

"I'm speaking out, out of sheer frustration with the lack of progress to bring our men home.

"Sixteen months is way too long and we are back to square one; I don't believe a lot of progress has been made."

Sher said the families had been told to be dignified and say nothing but she felt stuck between a rock and a hard place.

"I don't want to jeopardise the recovery by speaking but it is about time something is done."

She said Milton did not like working at Pike.

"He was not a miner. We need to bring him home; we need that as a family for closure."

Steve Rose, who lost son Stuart Mudge in the disaster, said today that he was also keen to see things moving.

Sixteen months down the track, and people were talking about reclaiming the main tunnel, not recovering the bodies.

Mr Rose said that he understood that due process had to be followed.

"However it's taking too long. The Government have wiped their hands of it, the receivers have on-sold the mine and the problem is still there.

"Body recovery is just a side shoot and we always get some sort of spin as to what's happening. We want people to focus on getting our men back and we will not rest until the bodies are in boxes in front of us."

Mr Rose said West Coasters were doers; they liked to get things done.

"What a bummer it has been, no one has been able to do anything; everyone is hamstrung. We are here and we are sick of waiting."

Attempts to contact the families' appointed spokesman, Bernie Monk, were unsuccessful this morning.

Mines Rescue has explained why it cannot just drill down from the surface, bypassing the large rockfall between the portal and the 29 dead.

That was what happened in the Chile gold mine rescue six weeks before the Pike disaster, when 33 men were brought out alive.

Mines Rescue manager Trevor Watts said that at the shallowest point, it was 110m (360ft) from the surface to the coal tunnels below.

"We couldn't drill a hole large enough for us to get down with breathing apparatus.

"People are still talking about Chile, but it was a 600mm diameter cage. Some of our miners are pretty big guys, they wouldn't fit.

"And they didn't have breathing apparatus."

Mr Watts said the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the disaster was expected to rule that every mine needed a proper second escape way.

Pike River statutory mine manager Steve Ellis said it would simply not be safe to lower men into a mine, with the potential for explosion, and only one way in and out.

The Department of Labour would never allow a rescue bid under these circumstances.

He said a hole larger than the Chile one could be drilled, but the cost started rising sharply.

"It would cost millions and millions."

The current plan is to seal the area in front of the rockfall.

Once the mine sells; Solid Energy is currently doing due diligence; there is talk about tunnelling around the rockfall, and installing a second escape tunnel.

USA: Mine exec pleads guilty in 2010 explosion

Extract from CNN

The man in charge of ensuring the safety of miners at West Virginia's Upper Big Branch coal mine pleaded guilty Thursday to charges that he helped conceal hazardous conditions from federal inspectors.

Gary May is the highest-ranking executive of former mine owner Massey Energy charged in connection with an April 2010 explosion that killed 29 miners. He could be sentenced to up to five years in prison and fined \$250,000 for conspiring to defraud the federal government, the U.S. attorney's office in Charleston said.

As part of his plea agreement, May has agreed to cooperate with the investigation into the worst U.S. mining accident in decades.

"I'm pleased that Mr. May is cooperating with our investigation," U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin said in a statement on Thursday's plea. "We hope he can give us a better picture of what was going on at this company."

In court Thursday, May admitted to tipping off mine managers that inspectors from the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration were on their way, allowing them to clean up hazards like poor airflow and piles of loose coal that would have led to citations and fines. He also admitted to falsifying safety records and telling miners to rewire a device that monitored flammable methane gas levels, allowing mine equipment to run illegally, prosecutors said.

"People who run coal mines have a fundamental obligation to be honest with mine regulators," Goodwin said. "When mine operators resort to tricks and deceit to keep government officials in the dark, our mine safety system unravels and miners are put in harm's way. The least we can do for coal miners is protect the integrity of the laws designed to keep them safe."

May faces an August 9 sentencing hearing in Beckley, West Virginia.

The Upper Big Branch explosion was the worst U.S. mine disaster since 1972, when 91 men died in a fire at the Sunshine Mine in Kellogg, Idaho. In a December report, MSHA found a methane ignition that set off flammable coal dust was the immediate cause of the 2010 explosion, but it also blamed the "unlawful policies and practices" of Massey Energy, which it said "promoted and enforced a workplace culture that valued production over safety."

Massey kept two sets of books to mislead federal inspectors and its own workers about hazards in the mine, and had twice as many accidents as it reported to regulators, the report concluded. The company failed to conduct adequate inspections, intimidated workers to prevent them from reporting violations and

tipped off crews to surprise inspections, MSHA found.

Alpha Natural Resources bought Massey in 2011 and has agreed to a \$209 million settlement to avoid prosecution. The deal includes payments of \$1.5 million to each family that lost a member in the Upper Big Branch mine.

An earlier state investigation found the mine lacked adequate ventilation; water sprays on equipment were not properly maintained and failed to function as they should have; and the mining company didn't meet federal and state safety standards for the application of rock dust, a crucial tool in keeping highly volatile coal dust from exploding.

Massey Energy -- whose former CEO, Don Blankenship, was an outspoken critic of federal regulators -- disputed that report, saying the blast probably occurred when natural gas flooded into the mine. MSHA said that investigators considered that explanation but that it didn't fit the facts.

Friday 30 March 2012

6 killed by coal mine gas poisoning in SW China

Extract from Xinhua

GUIYANG - Six people were killed and five injured from carbon monoxide poisoning while working in a coal mine in Guizhou province, local authorities said Friday.

The accident happened around 7 pm Thursday in Yanghe Coal Mine in Daguan township of Qianxi county, when 64 miners were working underground.

Fifty-eight miners, among whom five were injured, managed to escape the mine. The six trapped miners were found dead by rescuers early Friday morning, according to the safety

supervision bureau with the local government of the province.

The five injured, who are not in serious condition, are being treated in hospital. The cause of the accident is under investigation, rescuers said.

This week in mining accident history

30 March 1847

Stonelaw Colliery

Rutherglen, Scotland, UK

Underground coal mine

1 killed by shaft overwinding

A mineworker, Mr Jas Clifford, 42, Bottomer, an employee of J&R Reid, the mine owner, was killed on 30 March 1874.

Overwinding

From Main body of report: It appears that some time before the accident liberty had been granted by the manager to a young man to learn to work the engine, with the restriction, however, that he was not to be allowed to raise or lower men in the shaft. The deceased was the bottomer, and on the day of the accident, at midday, he signalled to the surface to be raised.

The engineman was not in the engine-house at the time, but Hutchison, the person referred to as learning to work the engine, who had been winding coals for an hour before, in raising the cage overwound it, and the deceased was thrown out and fatally injured. As explained by Hutchison "I cannot say how it happened, I got confused, and lost control of the machinery. I have drawn men frequently before, but on such occasions the engineman was alongside of me"

The engineman and Hutchison were charged by the Procurator Fiscal at the Autumn Circuit Court, Glasgow, with culpable homicide or culpable neglect of duty, but after a number of witnesses were examined the case was withdrawn.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

B

Belt take-up A belt pulley, generally under a conveyor belt and inby the drive pulley, kept under strong tension parallel to the belt line. Its purpose is to automatically compensate for any slack in the belting created by start-up, etc.



Belt take-up systems

-Ed