
Mining Accident News No.0805

Wednesday 12 March 2008

Poor operating procedures blamed for coal mine flood

HARBIN - Poor operating procedures were believed to be the cause for the coal mine flood that trapped 14 people for 13 days in northeastern Heilongjiang Province.

With no knowledge of the surrounding geological conditions, workers at the Jianbao Coal Mine, in Jixi City, used explosives in the pit and ended up letting in water, said Fang Dongchu, head of the rescue headquarters.

The water might have come from a nearby shaft, which was deserted 20 years ago and held about 500,000 cubic meters of water in a pond.

Fang said that the trapped miners might have escaped to two spots, a mined-out section and another deserted shaft that was connected to the tunnel where the accident occurred.

Rescuers had reached the mined-out area but found nobody there. They had cleared a 300-meter section of the tunnel in the deserted shaft, but it would take another week to cover the rest of the tunnel, Fang said.

The mine, though fully registered, was ordered to suspend operation on January 1 -- like all small coal mines in the province -- for safety checks after a colliery gas blast claimed 19 lives in Muling City in December. But it resumed production before it had received approval to do so.

The accident was uncovered on Monday when the provincial work safety authorities received a tip-off. But the mine manager tried to conceal it, saying that only two people were trapped underground.

The owner, manager and legal representative of the coal mine have been taken into police custody.

Thursday 13 March 2008

Mechanic killed at W.Va. coal prep plant

BOOMER, W.Va.: A contract mechanic at a coal prep plant was fatally crushed when a metal plate under a bulldozer fell on him while he was working on the machine, authorities said Thursday.

John G. Workman was killed Wednesday while working at Appalachian Fuels LLC's Alloy Prep Plant No. 1 in Boomer, said Ron Wooten, director of the state Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training.

Workman, 47, was alone and there were no witnesses, Wooten said Thursday.

The metal plate protects components such as oil lines on the underside of the dozer. Workman had secured it with a chain connected to a small crane on his work truck, but investigators believe the chain somehow slipped, pinning him.

While it's apparently common practice to secure a bulldozer skid plate with a chain, Workman wasn't following the manufacturer's recommended method, Wooten said. Caterpillar recommends using a proprietary jack.

Prep plants are used for work including blending various grades of coal and cleaning coal. A representative of Ashland, Ky.-based Appalachian Fuels did not immediately return a call Thursday.

Workman was the first person killed in a mine-related accident in West Virginia this year; there were nine such deaths in the state in 2007.

The federal Mine Safety and Health Administration's Web site lists five coal mining deaths nationwide so far this year.

Saturday 15 March 2008

Gas explosion in southwest China coal mine kills 14

BEIJING – Chinese state media report a gas explosion at a southwestern coal mine has killed 14 miners and injured four.

Investigators were looking into the cause of the Friday night blast in Yunnan province, the Xinhua News Agency said Saturday.

China has the world's deadliest mines, where explosions, cave-ins and floods killed nearly 3,800 people last year.

Coal accounts for about 70 percent of electricity production for the booming economy. But efforts to improve safety have been frustrated by lax enforcement, weak safety regimes and corruption among local officials and mine owners chasing profits.

Thursday 20 March 2008

Hefty fine for Utah coal mine

SALT LAKE CITY - The government ordered a \$420,300 fine after finding safety violations at a Utah coal mine.

Federal regulators say they assessed the fine against Andalex Resources Inc. for accumulations of coal dust and hydraulic oil on equipment at the Aberdeen coal mine in 2006 and 2007. The mine is near Price in Carbon County.

The government says dust and oil made the mine vulnerable to fire and explosion.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration says Andalex is controlled by Bob Murray, chief of Murray Energy Corp. The company is co-owner of the Crandall Canyon mine, where nine people died during two cave-ins in August.

There was no immediate response Thursday from Murray Energy.

According to MSHA inspection records, an excess of hydraulic oil, fine coal particles and explosive dust covered a conveyor belt, hoses,

electric conduits and tram motors at the Aberdeen mine.

Those conditions, combined with methane emissions and an ignition source, could "blow the whole mine up, so the violations are significant," said Bob Ferriter, a former MSHA engineer who teaches safety at the Colorado School of Mines.

"It's like being at the wrong end of a shotgun. It blows up everything. You don't want to be there," he said.

Coal miner files suit after videotaping underground hazards

An eastern Kentucky coal miner claims in a lawsuit that his employer improperly disciplined him for videotaping underground safety problems and showing the footage to federal inspectors. Charles Scott Howard filed the suit in Letcher County Circuit Court on Thursday. He is seeking unspecified financial damages for "the intentional infliction of emotional distress."

The move came one day after Howard filed a complaint with the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission against Cumberland River Coal Co. for reprimanding him.

Kim Link, spokeswoman for Cumberland River Coal, said the company disagrees with the allegations Howard makes in the lawsuit. She declined to comment further.

Howard played the eye-catching videotape to officials from the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration last year during a public hearing in Lexington. It showed barriers, which were constructed to seal off worked-out sections of the Brand Mill mine where he worked, with cracks so large that water gushed through them.

The barriers are supposed to be impenetrable so that explosive methane gas can't seep into places where miners are working.

After seeing the video, federal inspectors went to the mine and issued citations. The company,

in turn, presented Howard with a written reprimand for violating company policy against taking a video camera into the mine.

Howard filed a federal complaint Wednesday with the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission alleging that he was improperly sanctioned for documenting unsafe working conditions.

Lexington attorney Tony Opegard, representing Howard, said the company shouldn't be allowed to punish a miner for documenting unsafe conditions.

"When a company disciplines a miner for making a safety complaint, it has a chilling effect," Opegard said.

Opegard is asking federal authorities to order the coal company to remove the reprimand from Howard's personnel file and to order management personnel to undergo training about the rights of miners.

Interest in faulty underground mine seals arose two years ago following the deaths of 17 miners in Kentucky and West Virginia from methane gas explosions. After the explosions, the federal mine safety agency imposed tougher standards for the design and construction of seals.

Twelve men died at the Sago Mine in West Virginia in January 2006. Five others died at the Kentucky Darby mine in May of that year. In both cases, the blasts were fueled by methane in abandoned, sealed areas of the mines.

Opegard said the inspectors cited Cumberland River Coal for failing to perform preshift inspections of the seals and for not building the seals of material designed to impound water.

Link said at the time that the problems at the mine were fixed shortly after Howard shot the video in late April.

In the lawsuit, Howard said he was unaware that Cumberland River Coal had a policy against taking a video camera underground. He said in the lawsuit that using the video camera posed no risk to anyone.

Howard claims in the lawsuit that he believes the company issued the written reprimand as a first step toward firing him.

"That's a step in the process that leads to termination," Opegard said, "and all miners know that."

South Africa: Miner killed in blast at Matla coal mine

A miner was killed and four others seriously injured by an explosion in the Matla coal mine outside Witbank, the National Union of Mineworkers said on Thursday.

Spokesperson Paris Mashego said a methane explosion occurred around noon.

"These workers were supposed to be home for the Easter weekend, but were lured into working through zama-zama," he said.

Zama-zama was a voluntary shift system allowing mine workers to make extra money on their off days.

"It is very dangerous to work this shift because employers do not pay much attention to the required safety standards," Mashego said.

The union believed that the mine was under extra production pressure by the Matla power station, which apparently had low coal stocks.

Tuesday 25 March 2008

UPDATE - China: Nine managers jailed for coal mine blast

SHIJIAZHUANG: Nine coal mine managers were sentenced to between two and six years in jail for a coal mine blast that killed 108 miners and injured 29 others in north China's Hebei Province, a local court said on Tuesday.

Shang Zhiguo, head of the Liuguantun colliery, was sentenced to six years in jail for committing a major workplace safety crime. The deputy head Li Qixin, who was also in charge of production safety, was jailed for five years on the same charge, according to a Kaiping District People's Court ruling on Tuesday afternoon.

The coal mine investor Zhu Wenyou and head of the mine safeguard department Lv Xuezheng were jailed for three years each. The mine ventilation department chief Liu Wencheng was jailed for four years. Another four managers were sentenced to between two and four years in jail.

No defendants appealed the judgment.

The gas explosion happened at the Liuguantun Coal Mine in Kaiping District of Tangshan City at 3:30 p.m. on December 7, 2005.

The gas blast was a serious accident caused by the illegal operation of the mine, Li Yizhong, former director of the State Administration of Work Safety, had said.

The coal mine was still under construction and did not have a production licence before the accident happened, said Li.

An investigation revealed that the original design of the coal mine had been changed without approval. The altered design, which neglected safety considerations, allowed the exploitation from eight directions for a single coal layer without proper ventilation or gas surveillance systems.

The coal mine, formerly state-owned and with a designed annual production capacity of 300,000 tons, was privatized in 2002.

Thursday 27 March 2008

9 killed, 5 missing in coal mine gas outburst

CHANGSHA - At least nine miners were killed and five others missing in a colliery gas outburst in Central China's Hunan Province on Wednesday, the local government said on Thursday.

The accident occurred at about 6:30 pm at the Zhangjiazhou coal mine in Chenzhou City when 17 miners were working underground, according to the initial investigation.

Three workers managed to escape from the blast, which brought about 100 tons of coal from the coal bed.

A number of officials, including the deputy governor of Hunan and chief of the provincial work safety watchdog, were supervising the rescue operation at the site.

The colliery, with legal business licenses, was being merged with other mines under the local government's plan to reform the mining industry.

USA: Citations issued in coal mining death

Kentucky mine safety officials have issued multiple citations in the death of an eastern Kentucky coal truck driver who was killed at Blue Ridge surface mine in Letcher County. Authorities say Roy D. Sturgill, 29, died Jan. 8 after his truck backed over a dumping point and continued to go down the slope. Sturgill was employed by Bates Contracting in Whitesburg.



An investigation by the Office of Mine Safety and Licensing released Wednesday says the crash could have been prevented if the operator, Cumberland River Coal, had followed state law.

Investigators said the safety barrier near the edge of the dump site was constructed with damp soil and ranged in height from 17 to 46 inches. The barrier was supposed to be sturdy and tall enough to allow a rock truck's wheels to back against it, but not roll over it.

St. Louis-based Arch Coal Inc., parent company of Cumberland River Coal, declined comment to the Lexington Herald-Leader.

Sturgill's widow, Susie, said she and her two children, 9-year-old Kylar, and 7-year-old Brooke, have been devastated by the death. They have been staying with family in Whitesburg since Sturgill's death.

"It's been hard, especially with the kids," she said. "We talk about him everyday and we go to the cemetery everyday. I think that has helped."

Susie Sturgill is worried about how her children will cope with losing their father, who took a job in the mines in hopes of getting health insurance for his family.

"He did it for us," she said. "That's why he wanted the job so bad."

Roy Sturgill was the first coal miner in the nation to be killed this year. Since his death, five other miners have lost their lives in coal mining accidents in Alabama, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Texas, according to MSHA records.

Note:

Fatalities to date 2008:

China	60 (from Newsletter)
Kazakhstan	30
USA	11
Australia	2
New Zealand	0

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

F

fluxes Substances added to ore to lower its melting point and encourage chemical reaction in components of the ore during *smelting* or *converting*, or in assay refining. For different purposes, fluxes included ironstone, limestone, borax and sodium carbonate.

flying fox A system of transporting ore or fuel by means of ropes or cables suspended from towers or timber frames, the transported material being carried in steel buckets or *skips*, or on a flat platform. The ropeway could carry material over considerable distances, replacing road or tramway transport, or simply run from a high elevation to a lower one, or across a water course, in the latter cases being usually referred to as a 'flying fox'. *Also known as an aerial ropeway.*

G

Galloway boiler A boiler similar in external form to a Cornish boiler, but with a cluster of small firetubes running the length of the boiler from fire box to smoke box instead of the single tube of the Cornish type.

gangue The non-valuable matrix in which valuable metallic ore occurs.

gantry An elevated tramway or conveyor belt leading from a *brace* or a *mill* to ore bins, processing plant or *mullock dumps*.

- Ed.