
Mining Accident News No.0814

Wednesday 23 July 2008

Report: 30 miners remain trapped in flooded China coal mine

BEIJING — Twenty miners have escaped or been rescued from a flooded coal mine in southern China but six have died and 30 remain trapped, a state-run news agency said Tuesday.

Xinhua News Agency said 56 miners were trapped when the Nadu mine in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region flooded late Monday afternoon, but seven managed to escape. Six were confirmed dead Tuesday afternoon, it said.

Another 13 were rescued, Guo Shengkun, secretary of the regional Communist Party Committee, was quoted as saying.

Xinhua said rescuers had made contact with 12 of the trapped miners, and were trying to send water and food to them. They are trapped 2,000 yards below the surface, it said. There has been no contact with the other 24 miners.

China's mines are the world's deadliest, with explosions, cave-ins and floods killing nearly 3,800 people last year.

Friday 25 July 2008

Mine inquest reveals another rockfall

LAUNCESTON, Tas - The inquest into the death of Beaconsfield miner Larry Knight continues in Launceston today.

Rockfall survivors Todd Russell and Brant Webb yesterday cast a cloud over safety at the Beaconsfield gold mine and it's push for production.

Together they survived 14 days trapped underground by a rock collapse that killed fellow miner Larry Knight on April 25, 2006.

In later evidence to the inquiry yesterday a mine surveyor, Peter Wylie, revealed a separate rockfall had taken place just 12 hours before the event that killed Mr Knight.

"It was less than one tonne so it probably wasn't a great deal of rock," he said, adding that he continued to work in the area.

The surveyor filled out a report describing "large bangs" as the rocks fell, but because it was Anzac Day, a public holiday, he did not expect the report would be seen until next morning.

"Given that it was a public holiday I left it on (manager) Adrian Penny's desk so he would get it first thing the next morning," Mr Wylie said.

"It was my usual practice to give it straight to him.

"If he was there I'd give it to him in person and discuss the event with him."

Later on Anzac Day, the trio went to work in the level believing that it was safe.

Mr Wylie said he had filled out up to 30 similar reports in his four years at the mine.

"It probably wouldn't be the worst case scenario I've reported but it wouldn't be the best case scenario either," he told coroner Rod Chandler.

Surveyor gives evidence at Beaconsfield inquest

LAUNCESTON, Tas - Mining was placing too much stress on the underground rock at the Beaconsfield Gold Mine, the mine's senior surveyor said three months before a fatal rock fall, today's inquest in Launceston has heard.

Senior surveyor Simon Arthur gave evidence today at the coronial inquest into the rockfall that killed miner Larry Knight on April 25, 2006.

Mr Arthur wrote an email on February 8, 2006, to his friend, Steve Flude, his predecessor at Beaconsfield.

Parts of the mine had been closed for several months after two major October rockfalls which also forced a change of mining method, to the Avoca method.

"Things have been a bit sad here for the past five months or so," Mr Arthur said in the email tendered to the court.

"Stress on the rock is becoming too great.

"Pillar thicknesses under the Avoca method were not sufficient and as a result we have had a lot of failures in the sill drive backs (mine roofs) resulting in stopeing in the high grade areas being put on hold.

"Not good for production, safety and morale!!!

"Have also had a lot of problems with seismic events upsetting the locals, government are assessing potential damage."

A stope is an excavation in a mine which allows ore at different levels to be removed.

Mr Arthur told the court he had no officially recognised expertise in geotechnical or seismic issues or in judging the adequacy of the mine's pillar thicknesses.

Mr Arthur told coroner Rod Chandler that he started working at the Beaconsfield gold mine seven years ago.

The inquest continues.



Beaconsfield Gold Mine: A view of the 480 Central stope with backfilling, using a mixture of cement slurry and development waste, in progress.
Photo courtesy of Gold Mining Journal.

Note: previous two articles are extracts and compilations from ABC News Online and other sources – Ed.

Tuesday 29 July 2008

Beaconsfield supervisor's evidence

Extract from ABC News Online

The supervisor on duty when the fatal rockfall hit the Beaconsfield gold mine two years ago will continue his evidence today at the inquest into the death of Tasmanian miner Larry Knight.

The rockfall trapped Mr Knight's workmate, Todd Russell and Brant Webb underground for a fortnight.

Gavan Cheesman yesterday testified about warnings of seismic activity in the days leading up to the accident.

The shift forms in the lead-up to Anzac Day 2006 carried warnings about the area where the rockfall happened - level 925.

They included notes about firing problems and said level 925 and the one directly above it had been seismically active for an entire shift.

Yesterday, Mr Cheesman said there was no procedure to formally pass that information to senior managers, but he thought ground support in the area was adequate and not under significant pressure.

An earlier witness, miner Murray Gofton, disagreed, saying he felt the ground support where Larry Knight died was certainly 'under extreme pressure'.

And former miner Mick Borrill said 'rock noise was getting worse and worse. You knew something was going to happen'.

Falling lift crushes BHP worker

Extract from perth now

A MAN has died after a hydraulic lift fell on him at BHP's Nelson Point railway workshop in Port Hedland, WA.

BHP Billiton had suspended all rail and port operations at the centre until further notice, the resources giant said in a statement.

The 52-year-old Port Hedland man was conducting maintenance work on the scissor lift when it fell on him at 11am (WST) today, police said.

WorkSafe WA is investigating and BHP is conducting an internal investigation into the matter.

The resources safety division of the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection has flown inspectors to the town to carry out an investigation.

A division spokesman said the man suffered "crush injuries".

BHP said the man's next of kin had not yet been notified.

Wednesday 30 July 2008

Beaconsfield Mine inquest: former administrator's evidence

Extract from ABC News Online

The finances of the Beaconsfield Gold mine will be probed today, at the inquest into the death of miner, Larry Knight.

The former administrator of Allstate Explorations, which owned the mine in April 2006, is due to give evidence.

On Anzac Day 2006, a rockfall 925 metres underground killed Mr Knight, and trapped his workmates Brant Webb and Todd Russell for two weeks.

The inquest has heard concerns that the pressure of being in receivership could have compromised safety at the Beaconsfield mine, but Special Investigator, Greg Melick, found no evidence of that.

The lawyer for Larry Knight's family has said they want to call Allstate's administrator, Michael Ryan, because he was not interviewed by Mr Melick.

The mine's lawyers have said Mr Ryan, as a good accountant and administrator, would have taken a very serious approach to safety.

Several miners, including Brant Webb, have testified they were under pressure to boost production and keep their jobs. That has been denied by other witnesses.

Minutes from shift meetings presented as evidence yesterday, said production in April was 3,000 tonnes below target, giving staff the chance to make 'heroes of themselves' in coming weeks.



Beaconsfield Gold miners have given evidence they were under pressure to boost production. (ABC News: Jacqui Street)

But shift supervisor, Stephen Homan, who still works at the mine, said the note, while perhaps poorly worded, would not have changed miners' attitudes or made them work faster.

Mr Homan said there were procedures to deal with seismic activity, and six or more events in one shift would cause that level to be evacuated. He said he had previously raised concerns about rockfalls with senior managers, and the cases were followed up.

Thursday 31 July 2008

Gold Miners give evidence at Beaconsfield inquiry

Extract from ABC News Online

More miners will take the stand today at the inquest into the death of miner Larry Knight at the Beaconsfield Gold Mine in northern Tasmania two years ago.

On Anzac Day 2006, a rockfall 925 metres underground killed Mr Knight, and trapped his workmates Brant Webb and Todd Russell for two weeks.

Yesterday the inquest heard testimony from the mine's administrator, Michael Ryan who admitted the company was under financial pressure at the time of the rockfall, and its main financier, Macquarie Bank, wanted to boost its interest rate to cover its risk.

Mr Ryan said from the time he became administrator in 2001, he only handled the mine's finances, and left the operations to management.

Mr Ryan said he always allocated more money for safety, when requested, even if it meant exceeding the budget. He said he had been told rockfalls were a dangerous feature of the mine, and told the manager, Matthew Gill, to 'do whatever's possible to protect against them'.

The inquest resumes in Launceston this morning.

Beaconsfield inquest hears of ground support, safety concerns

Extract from ABC News Online

The eighth day of the Beaconsfield mine inquest in Launceston has been dominated by concerns about ground support and safety measures.

Several witnesses have spoken about a rockfall at the mine in October 2005, one level above and six months before the fatal accident.

In interview records shown today, supervisor, Stephen Homan, said of the first rockfall, "When [level] 915 went bang, I came in, shook my head, and took 12 weeks leave".



An inquest into the Beaconsfield mine has heard of a rockfall in October 2005, six months before another fatal incident. (File photo)

When pressed about his reasons, he said "Cause I could see the writing on the wall - that this wasn't going to be a real safe place to work".

Mr Homan also said that after the October incident, consultants were hired to improve ground support on the two levels.

He said the consultants used two-and-a-half metre cone bolts, but he immediately had concerns about their adequacy.

Mr Homan said fractures in the ground on the levels in question went far deeper than the bolts could reach.

He said he told a geologist the bolts were "stupid" and "a waste of time", but didn't take the matter further.

He said mine staff spent a lot of time studying how to solve the stability problems on those levels.

Meanwhile, a former shift manager at the Beaconsfield Gold Mine has criticised mine management's attitude to safety.

Dale Burgess, who now works in Western Australia, has given evidence at the Launceston inquest.

Speaking via video link, Mr Burgess told the inquest he thought the culture of safety at Beaconsfield was worse than at the Renison Tin Mine on Tasmania's West Coast, where three men died between 2001 and 2003.

He said mine management did not go underground to push safety as a priority and none of the miners knew how to analyse whether a job was safe.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

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Inverted syphon (siphon) Pipe carrying water across a valley or depression by a syphon action. Introduced when wrought iron piping became readily available, the first syphon in NSW being built in 1887. An intake fed water from a race into a pipe laid down the side of the valley, the pipe then crossing the valley on a trestle, and rising up the other side to an outfall into a continuation of the race at a slightly lower level. The pipe was sometimes placed in a cutting or on an embankment to maintain a straight line of fall and rise, and these sometimes remain when the pipe has long gone. Syphons often replaced the more expensive high level flumes to carry a water race line across a gully.

- Ed.