
Mining Accident News No.0818

Wednesday 3 September 2008

TAS: Mine inquest told 925 level 'not safe'

Extract from ABC Online, Australia

An inquest has heard the Beaconsfield Gold mine was warned by its geotechnical officer that the area of a fatal rockfall was not safe for mining, six months before the accident.

The inquest into the death of Larry Knight was shown a memo from geotechnical and geological engineer, Adrian Penney, to another mine manager, expressing concerns about safety on two levels after rockfalls in October 2005.

It said "the 915 and 925 failure zones would not be safe to rehabilitate sufficiently" to allow further mining.

Several months later, miners did return to the 925 level, but it is not clear if they went to the areas Mr Penney was concerned about.

The fatal accident happened on the 925 level in April 2006.

Mr Penney said he thought all measures taken after the 2005 rockfalls were "adequate".

Thursday 4 September 2008

'RECKLESS DISREGARD FOR SAFETY' MSHA seeks criminal charges in Crandall Canyon coal mine disaster

Little more than a year after nine men ultimately perished in a disaster in a Utah coal mine, MSHA has finally decided to seek criminal charges against mine operator Genwal Resources.

Extract from MineWeb, USA

The Mine Safety and Health Administration announced Wednesday that the agency has asked the U.S. Attorney for Utah to conduct a criminal investigation into the August 2007 Crandall Canyon coal mining disaster, which ultimately killed nine men.

In a news release, Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for MSHA said, "Through its investigation of the tragic accidents last year at Crandall Canyon, MSHA determined that the operator and its engineering consultants demonstrated reckless regard for safety. MSHA has referred this case for possible criminal charges."

Previously, both the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions had requested a criminal probe of Crandall Canyon. House committee chairman, Rep. George Miller, D-California, said he believed that Laine Adair, General Manager of the Crandall Canyon coal mine, "willfully misled" federal officials.

Melodie Rydalch, spokeswoman for Utah's U.S. Attorney, Brett Tolman, said that information from both Miller's committee and MSHA's report on the dual mine pillar collapses will factor into decisions about possible criminal prosecution.

Kevin Anderson, the attorney representing Genwal Resources, which operated Crandall Canyon, told the Utah news media, ""Regrettably, this report does not have the benefit of all of the facts." He added that the report "appears to have been tainted in part by ten months of relentless political clamouring to lay blame for these tragic events." Genwal's parent company is Murray Energy.

Last July MSHA announced it has imposed \$1.6 million in fines for violations by the mine operator which directly contributed to the deaths of six miners who were trapped when a catastrophic coal outburst accident occurred on August 7, 2007. Coal was blown into the mine opening in a section, which likely caused fatal injuries to miners Kerry Aldred, Don Erickson, Jose Luis Hernandez, Juan Carlos Payan, Brandon Phillips and Manuel Sanchez.

Three more men died on August 16, 2007, when another coal outburst hurt rescue workers. Miners Dale Black and Brandon Kimber and MSHA inspector Gary Jensen were killed.

Anderson told the press that "the facts demonstrate that Genwal Resources Inc. endeavored in good faith to follow safe mining practices and truly believed the mine was safe—a belief that was shared at the time by MSHA itself."

Friday 5 September 2008

WA: BHP halts iron operations after worker dies

Extract from Sydney Morning Herald

BHP Billiton's iron ore operations throughout Western Australia have been suspended after the second fatality at the Yandi mine in two weeks.

Police were called to the mine, 140 kilometres north-west of Newman, late yesterday afternoon.

Police Media's Greg Lambert said preliminary inquiries revealed the 19-year-old Northam man was killed in a motor vehicle accident while working at the mine.

Sergeant Lambert said a coronial investigation had begun into the death.

Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union assistant secretary Joe McDonald said he understood a Haulpak-style mining dump truck had rolled over the top of the man's vehicle.

"There's deaths every week in the North-West now, it's disgraceful," Mr McDonald said.

Perth-based BHP Billiton spokesman John Crowley confirmed 6000 staff at the company's seven iron ore mines and Port Hedland shipping facility would not start work at their normal times today.

In addition, the operations of 2000 staff at the mining giant's Perth head office would be suspended.

"We take any fatality very seriously, so we have suspended all operations in WA Iron Ore until further notice," Mr Crowley said.

"We have lost now two people, and within our business people come first, and we want to

make sure everyone is in the right frame of mind to know how about working safely."

He said a review of the 8000-staff work suspension would occur later today.

The employee of mine operator Henry Walker Eltin Mining was treated by mine site paramedics but died at the scene of the accident.

The man's family has been notified, but his name has not been released.

WA Department of Consumer and Employment Protection spokesman Peter Lewis said his agency was aware of the fatality and was investigating as part of the coronial inquiry.

He said that if endemic safety concerns were identified, the department had the power to close Yandi mine down under WA's Mine Safety Inspection Act.

The fatality is the second at Yandi in the past fortnight, and the third at a BHP-owned Pilbara facility in the past two months.

On August 26, a 29-year-old man died in a workshop accident at the mine.

That man, also an employee of Henry Walker Eltin Mining, was a fly-in, fly-out employee from Mandurah.

On July 29, a 52-year-old man died at BHP's railway workshop at the Nelson Point Works, near Port Hedland.

WA Premier Alan Carpenter said that Deputy Premier Eric Ripper would be talking to BHP today about the incident.

"I only have very scant details...obviously safety has to come first," Mr Carpenter said.

USA: Violation Cited in Fatal Mine Accident in April

ABINGDON, Va. – Notices of violation were issued in one of two recent fatal mining accidents in Southwest Virginia, said Mike Abbott, spokesman for the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

The Osaka Mining Corporation Mine No. 1, where 61-year-old David Sizemore was killed in a roof fall April 22, received a notice of violation for failure to contact the Division of Mines within 15 minutes after the accident, according to information Abbot provided via e-mail from a draft report.

"There were three (3) other violations issued as a result of personnel interviews and a spot inspection of the 001 Section which did not contribute to the accident," according to the e-mail.

The mine has been allowed to return to normal operations, according to the e-mail.

No notices of violation have been issued thus far for Consolidation Coal Company's Buchanan No. 1 Mine after a roof fall there killed 44-year-old Elden Todd Meadows on July 25, according to the e-mail.

Those normal operations have been allowed to resume, the scene of that accident must remain undisturbed as part of an order on closure.

Investigation of both incidents is still ongoing, according to the e-mail. Final reports on the accidents have not yet been released.

Chinese report says 24 killed in mine accident

Extract from Associated Press & China Daily

BEIJING (AP) — A gas explosion inside a mine in northeast China on Thursday killed 24 people and injured six, local authorities and state media said. Three others were trapped inside.

The official Xinhua News Agency said the 9 a.m. accident happened in a coal mine in the city of Fuxin in Liaoning province. Rescuers were searching for the three trapped people, it said, citing local authorities.

Forty-one miners were working inside at the time. Xinhua said 14 managed to return to the surface on their own.

A spokesman at the Fuxin safety bureau confirmed the explosion but would not provide further details. The man, who refused to give his name, referred questions to the local coal

mining bureau. A woman who answered the phone at the coal mining bureau hung up without answering questions.

China's coal mines are the world's deadliest, with numerous fires, floods and other disasters killing an average of 13 miners a day. Many accidents are blamed on small mines with low safety standards or those operating illegally.

The government has promised for years to improve mine safety but energy-hungry China depends on coal for most of its power generation.

Local Coal Mine Safety officials rushed to the mine to guide rescue efforts, the report said. It said an investigation into the cause is under way.

Sunday 7 September 2008

18 miners trapped in inundated coal mine in central China

Extract from Press Trust of India

Beijing - Eighteen miners were trapped in a flooded coal mine today in central China's Henan province, in a third mining accident this week.

Sixty two miners were involved in maintenance work at the mine when the accident occurred early this morning, official news agency Xinhua said.

While 38 managed to escape the flooded area, six have been rescued, it said. Eighteen workers, however, remained trapped inside the mine.

"The six who were rescued were not seriously injured. They were sent to a local hospital for observation," a spokesman with the rescue headquarters was quoted as saying by Xinhua.

Efforts are on to save the trapped miners, with over 40 rescuers equipped with six pumps dispatched to pump out water from the pit inundated by about 300 cubic meters of water, the spokesman said.

At least ten miners were killed after a coal mine gas blast in south-west China's Sichuan Province on Friday.

Twenty seven people were killed and six were injured on Thursday after a mine gas explosion in north-eastern Liaoning Province

Monday 8 September 2008

South Africa: Mine fatality angers unions

THE death on Friday of the 117th worker to lose his life on a mine this year has added to union anger about mine safety, which was under the spotlight during a health and safety summit on Friday.

It was reported at the weekend that a worker had been killed in an accident at Kroondal, a joint venture between Anglo Platinum and Aquarius Platinum.

The National Union of Mineworkers said: "Yet another mine worker died last night [Friday]. This time at Anglo Platinum in Rustenburg.

"The worker died due to a rock-related accident at Shaft K5 on night shift."

Sapa quoted Aquarius as saying that a site inspection was carried out on Friday night by Aquarius management, the inspectorate for safety and health from the department of minerals and energy, Redpath Mining management and union representatives.

Operations relating to the use of trackless equipment have been suspended at the shaft while the drivers of load haul dump vehicles are retrained.

Solidarity spokesman Reint Dykema said it seemed that "it's an accident a day [at the mines]".

Business Times reported yesterday that the number of mine deaths was slightly down this year compared with last year.

MSHA Rule Would Require Drug, Alcohol Testing

U.S. miners who perform safety-sensitive jobs and their supervisors will be randomly tested for alcohol, amphetamines, marijuana, and numerous other drugs, except when they are used in accordance with a valid prescription, if MSHA finalizes a rule it proposed today. Mine operators could test for additional drugs beyond the list contained in the rule, which includes barbiturates, benzodiazepines such as Valium and Xanax, cocaine, methadone, opiates, PCP, and synthetic and semi-synthetic opioids such as hydrocodone, hydromorphone, oxycodone, and oxycodone. Testing would also be required for these substances prior to employment; after an accident if the miner may have contributed to the accident, based on reasonable suspicion that a miner has used a prohibited substance, and when miners who have violated the rule return to duty.

The rule says only Kentucky requires miners to be tested for alcohol. There is no much data on the size of the drug and alcohol problem in the U.S. mining sector, although federal and state authorities have held hearings, symposia, and training programs to obtain data. MSHA acknowledged the data gap in the rule but said evidence suggests some fatal incidents have occurred that involved miners who had used alcohol or drugs. The rule also would prohibit possession of alcohol or drugs on mine property and would require mine operators, within a year of the rule's effective date, to implement alcohol- and drug-free mine programs consisting of a written policy, employee education, supervisory training, and referrals to assistance for miners who violate the policy. The proposed rule defines safety-sensitive job duties as "activities where a lapse of critical concentration could result in an accident, serious injury, or death."

Comments are due by Oct. 8. The rule requires mine operators to provide one opportunity for violators to get help and retain

their job, but it leaves it to the operator to determine the disciplinary consequences for subsequent violations. MSHA estimates it would cost mine operators about \$16 million to comply with the rule in year one and about \$13 million to comply each year thereafter.

Current accident investigations do not routinely include an inquiry into the use of alcohol or drugs, according to the rule, which adds, "and this is a failure that the proposed rule intends to address." Visit <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/E8-20561.htm> to read the full text of the rule.

Tuesday 9 September 2008

26 killed in landslide in Chinese mine-warehouse

Extract from RTTNews.com

Monday, more than 26 persons were killed in a landslide in a mine-warehouse in north China's Shanxi Province, according to reports available.

Several people remain trapped in the warehouse of the Tashan Mine in Xiangfen County, Linfen City, which was drenched by torrential rain.

The accident at the mine-warehouse occurred around 8 a.m., local time.

Local police and residents are engaged in rescue operations. The exact number of casualties is not yet finalized.

The warehouse in the mountainous area is being used to store waste material from the mining operation.

Chinese mines are plagued by high rate of accidents, which kill an estimated 10,000 miners every year due to outdated equipment and poor safety precautions.

Thursday, 27 mines were killed and six others wounded in a gas explosion at a coalmine in north-eastern China's Liaoning province.

Mine death inquest to hear more evidence

Extract from ABC Online, Australia

A senior miner will continue giving evidence today into last year's fatal mine accident in Queensland's central highlands.

Wayne Pickstone was the mine deputy at the Moranbah North Mine on the day Jason Blee, 33, was killed.

He died after being crushed by mining machinery in April 2007.

Mr Pickstone yesterday told the court he had overlooked completing a statutory report into the incident while on his shift.

Today, the Coroner's Court is expected to hear evidence from two employees from Walter Mining, the contracting company that Mr Blee worked for.

In yesterday's proceedings, it was revealed Mr Blee's widow Rachel was told of her husband's death via a text message from a worker at another mine.

The inquest is due to continue for the rest of the week.

Aquarius Platinum says miner dies in accident at Kroondal's K5 shaft

Extract from Forbes.com

LONDON (Thomson Financial) - Aquarius Platinum Ltd. said an employee of mining contractor Redpath Mining was killed in an accident involving a load haul dump vehicle at Kroondal's K5 shaft in South Africa on Friday.

The country's Department of Minerals and Energy suspended use of all trackless mining machinery at Kroondal mine and the adjacent Marikana mine while drivers are retrained, Aquarius said, adding it must wait for government permission to restart these operations.

An investigation by company, government and union representatives is still pending.

Mine worker dies in accident at Grootegeluk

Extract from *Mineweb*

Yesterday afternoon a third mine worker since Friday's summit of the Mine Health and Safety Council died in another mining accident. In the latest incident a contractor at Exxaro's Grootegeluk coal mine outside Ellisras died when a conveyor belt structure collapsed. Another two contractors were seriously injured.

"It is the third death in South African mines since management of mining companies and the department of minerals and energy affairs discussed an encompassing action plan for mining safety. The death toll for 2008 already stands on 119," explains Solidarity spokesperson Jaco Kleynhans. Kleynhans is of the opinion that the implementation of safety action plans should be done urgently to prevent the loss of more lives on South African mines and emphasises that the trade union supports the review of incentive schemes linked to production.

The department of minerals and energy affairs has meanwhile started an investigation into the incident.

56 killed in Chinese mining accident

Extract from *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

At least 56 people in northern China have been killed in a mudslide at an iron ore mine. Dozens of people were injured and the authorities say hundreds are missing. A reservoir holding ore dregs near the town of Taoshi collapsed, covering roads and houses in several metres of mud and sludge in just minutes. Aid workers are searching for survivors.

The director of the mine and eight company officials have been arrested. The mine was illegal, did not comply with safety regulations, and the stored waste had surpassed the capacity of the reservoir.

Accidents are a regular occurrence in China's mining industry. Official figures say 3,800 people were killed in mining accidents last year, but independent observers say the real figure is much higher.

Wednesday 10 September 2008

Union plans to down tools at several SA mines to mourn deaths

Extract from *Mining Weekly Online, South Africa*

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on Wednesday called on all its members to observe a day of mourning whenever a mining accident claimed the life of a mineworker.

This comes as 5 000 workers had downed tools at gold producer DRDGold's Blyvooruitzicht mine, in Carletonville, to mourn the death of a colleague the week before.

"We are saying that we have zero tolerance towards mining accidents, and that safety is important for us as workers. When a worker dies, we will mourn," NUM spokesperson Lesiba Seshoka told *Mining Weekly Online*.

DRDGold spokesperson James Duncan, meanwhile, said that it was too early to estimate what the impact of Wednesday's downing of tools would be on the mine's production.

He expected production to resume with the night shift on Wednesday.

On September 4, a mineworker had died, while three others had been injured at the Blyvooruitzicht mine, after a seismic event had triggered a rockfall underground. This had been the second death at the mine in a three-week period.

Further, the NUM was also planning a day of mourning at Harmony Gold's Elandsrand mine, near Carletonville, on Thursday, with 6 000 workers expected to participate.

On September 1, the mine reported that two of its employees had died during the previous weekend, while gold and uranium producer Simmer and Jack Mines had reported a death at its Buffelsfontein gold mine owing to a seismic event.

Harmony Gold executive for investor relations Marian van der Walt told *Mining Weekly Online* that it had been informed of the NUM's plans and that the gold producer was in full agreement with the union regarding this.

She added that the Elandsrand mine would hold a safety shift early on Thursday morning, after which employees would attend a memorial service.

Van der Walt said a day of production would be lost and that production would resume on Friday.

Meanwhile, Seshoka said that the union would ideally like a day of mourning to be arranged at Pamodzi Gold's Orkney mine, Aquarius Platinum's Kroondal mine, and Exxaro's Grootegeluk mine, where mining accidents have collectively claimed three lives during the last two weeks.

However, he noted that such action was usually arranged by the NUM's branches and not by the union's head office.

Nearly 120 mineworkers have already died in mining accidents this year.

Thursday 11 September 2008

Mine inquest told of seismic increase

Extract from ABC Online, Australia

A Beaconsfield mine manager has told an inquest he knew seismic activity at the mine had increased in the week before a fatal rockfall.

The Chief Geologist Peter Hills has given evidence at the Launceston inquest into the death of miner Larry Knight in the 2006 Anzac Day collapse.

Mr Hills was shown a report which recorded large seismic events in the week before Anzac Day, as well as reports from shift bosses that the mine was "active all night" three days before the rockfall.

Mr Hills told the inquest he "wasn't surprised" by this level of activity, which was caused by firing explosives.

He said he thought the seismic activity was diminishing in the days before the major event.

China landslide kills 151, hopes fade for missing

Extract from International Herald Tribune, France

XIANGFEN, China: A landslide that unleashed a three-story wave of mud and iron ore waste at an illegal mining operation has killed at least 151 people and authorities fear the death toll could climb by hundreds more, state media said on Thursday.

In a matter of minutes, the mud and waste inundated an entire village of 1,000 people and an outdoor market with hundreds of patrons on Monday in Shanxi province's Xiangfen county, the China Daily newspaper reported, citing witnesses.

State media put the official death toll at 151 people with 36 more injured.

Authorities have declined to state a figure for the number of missing people, saying an investigation is continuing. But news reports said hundreds may be buried in the mud.

"There's almost no hope of their survival ... they have been buried for three days under two meters (yards) of slush," Wang Jun, head of the State Administration of Work Safety, said in the China Daily report.

Wang said there could be several hundred people buried under the sludge, according to the report.

But Huang Yi, a spokesman of the administration, later told The Associated Press that Wang had not commented on the possible number of people buried.

Calculating that number is made particularly difficult because most of the mine workers were migrants from elsewhere in Shanxi, or from Chongqing and central Hubei province.

One of the worst-hit areas was Yunhe, the village where the market was located. Yunhe sits in a valley at the foot of Tashan, the hill on which the iron ore mine was operating.

Yunhe's 1,300 residents were mainly farmers of wheat, corn and other crops, but also supplemented their wages by providing transport to the nearby mines, according to a local government Web site's official description of the place.

Most of the patrons of the outdoor market were migrant workers from the mine and residents of neighboring villages, with many buying food to prepare for the upcoming mid-autumn festival holiday, state media reported.

All that was left after the mudslide were a handful of two-story buildings that remained standing on the fringe of the sludge, which spanned an area the size of four football fields.

More than 2,000 police, firefighters and villagers were mobilized in the search for the missing, while police sealed off the village with checkpoints on all roads leading to it, blocking access to unauthorized vehicles.

Officers were still visiting various households in the area and interviewing residents for a final tally on the number of people missing or buried, state news broadcaster CCTV said in its midday bulletin.

A preliminary investigation showed the landslide was triggered by heavy rains that brought down a retaining wall at a waste dump operated by an illegal mine, said Wang Dexue, deputy head of the State Administration of Work Safety.

The wall's collapse sent a wave of mud and iron waste over the town, located just below the waste site. Gray sludge also flooded the valley, washing out homes, cars, and buildings, including one where more than 100 people from

a local mining company were holding a weekly meeting, the Shanghai Morning Post said.

The disaster underscores two major public safety concerns in China: the failure to enforce protective measures in the country's notoriously deadly mines, and the unsound state of many of its bridges, dams and other aging infrastructure.

There are more than 9,000 mine waste dumps throughout China, and more than half of them operate without work safety permits, the CCTV report said.

Friday 12 September 2008

Mine rockfall not preventable: Inquest

Extract from ABC News Online, Australia

A manager at the Beaconsfield Gold mine has told an inquest he is convinced the fatal rockfall more than two years ago could not have been prevented.

The mine's Chief Geologist Peter Hills has given evidence at the Launceston inquest into the death of miner Larry Knight.

He told the inquest that mine management and experts agree the seismic event on Anzac Day 2006 was so great that no ground support could have held the rock in place.

He said the mine now uses methods that avoid miners going into risky areas because managers "weren't satisfied" any support system would be able to withstand another similar event.

Mr Hills' evidence has concluded the eighth week of hearings.

The inquest will resume later this month when Mine Manager Matthew Gill will be called to give evidence.

It is now unclear whether the Coroner Rod Chandler will present his findings before the end of the year, as the final submissions from the lawyers are not due until November.

- Ed.