
Mining Accident News No.0827

Tuesday 4 November 2008

USA: Gas ignites, 2 miners burned at W.Va. coal mine

FELLOWSVILLE, W.Va. — Two coal miners were burned on their faces and arms Monday when gas ignited, creating a brief flash of fire at a mine in northern West Virginia.

The Whitetail Kittanning Mine was shut down and two investigators were sent to the site in Preston County, said federal Mine Safety and Health Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere. The names of the injured miners were not immediately released. One was a shuttle car operator, the other a heavy equipment operator, Louviere said.

They were taken to a hospital with serious burns, though they were able to walk off a mine elevator after the 1:50 p.m. accident.

The mine is owned by Kingwood Mining, a subsidiary of Abingdon, Va.-based Alpha Natural Resources.

The burns are not considered life-threatening and the injured miners are being treated at West Penn Burn Center in Pittsburgh, Alpha spokesman Ted Pile said in an e-mail.

'Extremely unusual incident'

State Mine Safety Director Ron Wooten says a fiery ball travelled 100 feet in two directions in an underground Preston County coal mine Monday burning two miners.

Director Wooten says the "yellowish ball of fire" was the result of what appears to be a methane gas ignition at a longwall mining face inside Kingwood Mining Co.'s Whitetail Kittanning Mine near Fellowsville.

Wooten says it appears the ignition was "fairly violent." He says some coal dust may also have been involved. The injured men were standing near a continuous mining machine approximately 30 feet from the ignition point. They were held overnight for observation at the burn center in Pittsburgh. Wooten hopes to speak with the miners sometime Wednesday.

Wooten says flash fires happen in underground coal mines, but not like this. "It's not that unusual to have an ignition in a face area or on a longwall face, but to have one this significant is very unusual, extremely unusual," Wooten said.

That section of the Whitetail Kittanning Mine will remain closed until, according to Wooten, "We are sure we have resolved the issue."

Wooten says it's too early to tell if the mine owner or anyone is at fault for what happened. "We have some questions that involve the mine owner, but we don't have answers to those questions yet. Until we know we're not going to speculate," he said.

Two weeks ago, the mine was fined more than \$763,000 after being cited 13 times in a year for allowing coal dust to accumulate along conveyer belts. Coal dust can catch fire because of friction from the belts, and it can intensify explosions.

The company said it would contest the fines and noted that MSHA could have evacuated the mine had it considered workers in imminent danger.

Whitetail Kittanning employs about 260 people and produces about 1.4 million tons of coal annually.

Alpha operates 57 mines in West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. The company also is the target of a \$3.3 billion takeover by Cleveland-based iron ore producer Cliffs Natural Resources.

USA: Judge raises fines in 2002 Quecreek Mine accident

Extract from Pittsburgh Post Gazette, Pittsburgh, PA, USA

A judge has increased the fines levied against two companies after the July 2002 Quecreek Mine accident, which left nine miners trapped underground for more than three days.

PBS Coals Inc. and Musser Engineering argued in August 2007 hearings that they did all they could to ensure miners' safety, and each was ordered by the U.S. Mine Safety and

Health Administration to pay \$5,000 in penalties. Administrative Law Judge Robert J. Lesnick yesterday raised the fines against the companies to \$55,000 each and said they were "grossly negligent."

The miners, working for Black Wolf Coal Co. at PBS's Quecreek Mine, became trapped on July 24, 2002, when they breached the abandoned and flooded Saxman mine. They had relied on outdated maps that showed the mine was 300 feet away. All nine miners were rescued.

Representatives of the companies have said they took reasonable precautions based on the information they had. They didn't say if they would appeal the ruling.

Smoking blamed for fatal mine explosion in south China

Extract from Xinhua, China

NANNING, - A fatal gas explosion last month at a south China coal mine was caused by smoking.

Nine people were killed at the accident mine of the Heshan Coal Mine Co. Ltd, in Heshan of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on Oct. 10.

Gas inside the mine exploded when a miner used a cigarette lighter, which was banned, the regional coal mine safety administration said on Tuesday. Nine other miners were injured.

Fourteen government officials including the vice mayor of Heshan have been suspended in the wake of the explosion. The mine's legal representative and manager were under surveillance, the administration said.

The company is the largest of its kind in Guangxi with an annual production capacity of around 8 million tons.

India: Ledo mine fire kills 1, injures 18

Extract from The Telegraph, Calcutta, India



Dibrugarh: A ball of fire, fuelled by highly combustible methane gas, killed one worker and injured 18 others at Ledo colliery in

Tinsukia district early this morning.

The mishap took place at around 5.45am in an underground mine operated by Coal India Limited at Ledo, located on the easternmost tip of Assam.

The only casualty was reported at the hospital of the Indian Oil Corporation (Assam Oil Division) in Digboi — 25 km from the coalfields — where two of the injured were admitted. The dead miner has been identified as Putul Doimari. The condition of another injured person in hospital, L. Pollaiya, is also stated to be serious.

Eight others have been admitted to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) here and six to the Coal India Limited (CIL) hospital at Margherita, 7km away. Three others who had sustained minor injuries were discharged after first aid at the CIL hospital. The condition of two of the injured at the AMCH was stated to be serious.

"Altogether 39 miners were at work when the accident occurred," CIL's North East Coal Fields (NECF) manager (public relations) Ranjit Kumar Dutta said over telephone.

CIL mining engineer Anil Kumar Bharali said that in deep-pit mining, extraction of coal is often accompanied by release of gases like carbon monoxide and methane. "We take precaution by sealing all possible areas on the walls of the tunnels from where the gases might

escape. In today's accident, some gas escaped, leading to the accident," he added.

Another CIL official said that most of the accidents in coal mines are caused by methane combustion.

Nirmal Chand, one of the injured under treatment at CIL hospital, said that he saw "a ball of fire" rushing towards him from the depths of the tunnel which is dug at an incline.

"I saw many of my co-workers engulfed in the blaze and smoke. Screams for help and agony filled the tunnel. Some of them rushed towards the opening," he added. A part of the tunnel's wall also collapsed, another injured S. Sommaiyya said.

Rescuers struggled against black fumes, to bring out the workers, with the help of the rail-trolleys, to safety.

All the 39 workers had entered the mine at 11pm the previous night and their shift was scheduled to end at 7am.

"The rescue operation was carried out with the help of the Tinsukia district administration and Margherita sub-divisional administration. We managed to rescue the people in a very short time," Dutta said.

The CIL official said that they have taken the matter very seriously and an internal inquiry has been ordered.

A high-level team from the department of mines, government of India and two CIL directors will arrive from Calcutta tomorrow for an assessment and conduct the inquiry.

Tinsukia deputy commissioner K.K. Dwivedi, chief general manager of NECF Anil Kumar Bora and the sub-divisional officer (civil) of Margherita Partha Pratim Mazumdar also inspected the site.

The CIL has three mines at Ledo, apart from two open-cast coalfields. The North East Coal Fields annually yield just over 1 million tonnes of coal. The mine where the accident occurred has an annual output of around 45,000 tonnes.

Today's accident was the third in these coalfields. In 1979, 19 miners were killed when part of a tunnel caved in while in 1993, nine workers were killed in a similar accident.

SAfrican union wants levy to help curb mine deaths

Extract from Reuters

JOHANNESBURG - South Africa's Solidarity trade union on Tuesday asked the government to impose a training levy on every accident or death that occurs at a mine, in a bid to force mining companies to cut fatal accidents.

South Africa has an appalling safety record. Solidarity said 142 workers have died in mines so far this year, compared to 221 for the whole of 2007, and 200 in 2006.

The latest death was that of a worker at a coal mine owned by diversified mining firm Exxaro on Monday.

Solidarity said a financial penalty would make mining firms draw a valuable comparison between their money and the value of their workers' safety.

Jaco Kleynhans, Solidarity's spokesperson said calls to mining firms to end the deaths were "falling on deaf ears".

"If mining groups realise that the levies on accidents are going to affect their pockets, they will just have to take better care of their employees' safety," said Kleynhans.

"A monetary value should not be assigned to the lives of employees, but mines regard money, instead of employees, as their most important asset. As soon as this so-called asset is affected, mines will hopefully introduce every possible measure to ensure safety."

Funds raised in this way could be used for safety training at the mines, the traditionally white union said.

Mining companies have suffered production losses after fatalities, due to routine shutdowns ordered by the government for investigations.

Union members have vowed to stop work for a day when a colleague is killed.

Led by Gold Fields, which has the worst fatality record among gold producers this year, and Anglo Platinum, a unit of Anglo American Plc, which has the most deaths in the platinum sector, mining firms in South Africa have repeatedly vowed they won't tolerate fatalities.

To this end, Gold Fields shut parts of key mines for safety repairs for months, losing output and profits. Angloplat has also carried out similar shutdowns to make safety improvements.

Mining houses say fatalities are declining and point to the fall in deaths compared to the same period last year. They have set a target of cutting deaths by 20 percent each year.

Wednesday 5 November 2008

Tas: New mining safety code

Media Release
Graeme Sturges, MP
Minister for Infrastructure

The Acting Minister for Planning and Workplace Relations, Graeme Sturges today announced the approval of a new Code of Practice designed to deliver a higher standard of safety for underground mining and associated operations in Tasmania.

The code will give effect to a number of national standards and guidelines recommended by Coroner Donald Jones in his May 2008 report into the deaths of Renison miners Jarrod Jones, Matthew Lister and Sidney Pearce.

It provides practical guidance for mine operators on safety management systems, risk management, safety requirements for conveyors and the application of exposure standards for atmospheric contaminants.

"The Tasmanian Government is firmly committed to implementing Coroner Jones recommendations," Mr Sturges said.

"Mine workers and their families need to know that everything possible has been done to ensure a safe working environment."

The new Code, Applicable Standards for Underground Mining and Associated Operations, comes into effect on 5 November 2008. It can be found on the Workplace Standards Tasmania website at www.wst.tas.gov.au

Saturday 8 November 2008

Death toll rises to 29 in NW China colliery gas explosion

Extract from Xinhua, China

XI'AN -- Death toll in a colliery gas explosion in Chengcheng County, northwest China's Shaanxi Province, rose to 29, as rescuers on Saturday found the last body of the 29 miners.

The explosion took place in the Yaotou mine at about 8 p.m. on Oct. 29. Only seven of the 36 workers managed to escape.

The mine, with a complete set of valid licenses, has an annual capacity of 330,000 tons.

Sunday 9 November 2008

3 men, including preacher, found dead in Philippine gold mine

Extract from Associated Press

ITOGON, Philippines — Three small-scale miners, including a preacher, were found dead inside a mine in Itoigon town in Benguet province.



Entrance to the Itoigon mine where three died due to gas poisoning

The three who died of gas poisoning were identified as Virginio Singwa, 38 and a mechanic and a preacher in Bua church; Roel Singwa, 32, a pocket miner and Roger Rillera, 45 from Bauang, La Union.

The three died in a private mine in First Gate, Antamok Tram in Itogon reportedly owned by a Juanito Asiong.

The three reportedly went inside the mine's tunnel Friday morning to conduct an ocular inspection. The three who were reportedly not expert miners were said to have forgotten to open the blowers that were supposed to remove the poisonous fumes from the mine.

Singwa's wife said that she got worried Friday evening when his husband failed to return. She immediately reported the matter to police.

When they saw the miners' vehicle near the portal of the mine they immediately launched a search operation.

The bodies of the three were discovered about 50 meters below ground level inside the tunnel Sunday morning.

The remains of Virginio and Roel Singwa were taken to Bua church while the relatives of Rillera from La Union were being awaited at the Baguio public cemetery.

A mine tragedy recently occurred in a separate mine in Itogon town last September. Waters at the height of Typhoon Niña flooded Goldfield Antamok mine and trapped several miners. Six miners died, while 16 were rescued in the incident.

The miners are mostly impoverished villagers who risk their lives and dig their way without permission into gold mining tunnels abandoned by large mining companies.

Itogon in Benguet province is about 125 miles north of Manila.

USA: Obama expected to tighten coal regulations

Extract from *Charleston Gazette, Charleston, WV, USA*

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - When Barack Obama becomes president, the coal industry isn't likely to go bankrupt. But coal operators and coal-fired utilities should brace for tougher regulation of mine safety, strip mining and especially greenhouse gas emissions.

Coal industry watchdogs are looking for Obama to reverse Bush administration rule changes, beef up enforcement, and put the nation's first ever limits on carbon dioxide from power plants.

"While coal mining is vitally important to the nation, it can kill and maim miners and foul the land, air and water when mine safety and environmental laws are violated," said Patrick McGinley, a West Virginia University environmental law professor.

"I expect the Obama administration will act decisively to both promote responsible coal mining and vigorously enforce mine safety and environmental laws that protect coal miners' lives and coalfield communities."

Before Obama won, even the National Mining Association seemed to acknowledge that the Illinois senator - his concerns about mining and coal's contribution to climate change aside - was unlikely to eliminate the industry.

"Destroying the coal industry would break America's energy backbone," said NMA President Hal Quinn. "We trust the candidates understand this and do not believe that destroying the coal industry is part of the change we need."

After last week's victory, Obama's transition team began its work toward taking over the White House on Jan. 20.

For the coal industry, among the more important decisions will be who takes over two government agencies that are little known outside the coalfields: The Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration and the

Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement. Decisions about such sub-Cabinet posts are months away.

Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers union, said he wants to see MSHA put back in the hands of a miners' advocate, as opposed to the industry officials who ran the agency for much of the last eight years.

"That agency is there to protect the miners, and we need someone who will protect the miners," Roberts said last week. "We think there's a direct correlation between who is running that agency and the tragedies we had in 2006 and 2007."

Roberts and other mine safety advocates want MSHA to revisit rule changes made by the Bush administration, including more than a dozen tougher rule proposals that were dropped from the agency agenda after Bush took office in 2001. And they want MSHA to focus less on "compliance assistance" for operators and more on simply enforcing the federal Mine Safety Act.

"The Mine Act was never intended to boost production or to promote the mining industry," said Tony Oppgaard, a mine safety expert who worked for MSHA during the Clinton administration. "The new head of MSHA needs to give inspectors the freedom and the backing to vigorously enforce the law."

Mine safety advocates also want Obama to speed up implementation of the 2006 MINER Act, and re-examine what MSHA is doing to combat a resurgence of black lung disease in Appalachia.

"Black lung probably is the biggest health threat facing the nation's miners, so MSHA's new leader should fast-track rulemaking to lower the agency's exposure limits for respirable dust," said Nathan Fetty, a public interest lawyer who is suing MSHA over its failure to strengthen black lung protections.

Reducing size of valley fills

Environmental groups are looking for similar efforts by Obama to toughen enforcement of water pollution and reclamation rules that govern strip mining.

Among other things, citizen groups hope to stall a final decision on the federal Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement's proposed rewrite of the stream "buffer zone" rule until after Obama takes office.

But at the top of their list is Bush's repeal of a Clean Water Act rule that redefined "fill material" to legalize the huge mountaintop removal valley fills that bury streams.

"I don't think we would end up mining less coal," said Joe Lovett, a lawyer and director of the Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment. "But it would dramatically reduce the size of valley fills and surface mines, and would shift mining from surface mines to underground mines."

Issues surrounding the fill rule are already pending at the U.S. Supreme Court, in a case involving a permit for an Alaska gold mine.

And it's possible that environmental groups will seek a legislative change instead, with a bill still pending in Congress to overturn the Bush fill rule.

"That way, a future administration couldn't change it again," said Joan Mulhern, a lawyer with the Washington group Earthjustice.

Tackling climate change

In his victory speech last week, Obama listed a "planet in peril" second on his list of challenges the nation faces. He cited it just after "two wars" and before "the worst financial crisis in a century."

Obama has promised swift and tough action on the biggest issue facing the coal industry: National and international efforts to try to limit carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming and climate change.

During the campaign, Obama pledged to reduce U.S. carbon emissions by at least 80 percent by 2050. In the near term, his

campaign plan called for reducing emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

UMW officials and some within the coal industry aren't as concerned about the 2050 target. But the near-term reductions scare coal industry backers. They say cutting back to 1990 emissions levels by 2020 doesn't provide adequate time to work out the long list of hurdles to implementing carbon capture and sequestration technology on coal-fired power plants.

Eugene Trisko, a lawyer who follows climate change issues for the UMW, said last week that he hopes Obama's near-term carbon reduction promises "will be re-examined in the harsher light of today's economy."

But Lexi Shultz, deputy director of climate programs at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said Friday that other steps - such as tougher fuel economy standards and improved energy efficiency - could be used to meet the 2020 limits Obama proposed.

"There's a tremendous amount of potential out to 2020, without bringing on a bunch of new technology," Shultz said. "A lot of this does not have to come out of the backs of the coal industry in the early years."

USA: Today is anniversary of Kansas mine disaster, 1888

Extract from Pittsburg Morning Sun - Pittsburg, KS, USA

PITTSBURG — There are no flags flying at half-staff today, no proclamations of mourning. But, a little after 5 p.m. on Nov. 9, 1888, the largest mine disaster in Kansas history took place at Frontenac.

A total of 44 men and boys were killed in an explosion at Mine No. 2, owned by the Cherokee and Pittsburg Coal and Mining Company. The blast was so strong that it broke windows in nearby houses.

"The disaster was reported in newspapers across the country," Jerry Lomshek of Chicopee — who continues to do research about the disaster — said. "On the first day it

was said that 100 had been killed, but that quickly dropped down to 52. After doing all this research, we've boiled it down to 44."

The dead included immigrants from France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, England, Scotland, Ireland, Norway and Austria. Lomshek believes that the oldest victim was 45.

"There were six teenagers, including two 13-year-olds," he said.

Lomshek said that Mine No. 2 was considered one of the best, most modern mines in the state, but was also dry and had problems with accumulations of coal dust. Robert Craig, superintendent of all mines owned by the Cherokee and Pittsburg Coal Mining Company, had ordered sprinkling in the mine to settle the dust.

"It appears this was done sporadically and less than was needed," Lomshek said.

Another factor was the common practice of miners, whether they were experienced or not, setting off their own explosives or shots.

"Some companies by 1888 had adopted the practice of utilizing specially employed shot-firers who detonated the explosive charges of all the miners in a mine after they had left for the day," Lomshek said. "The Cherokee and Pittsburg had not."

Regulations required that no more than five pounds of black powder explosive could be taken into the mines by a miner at one time, but this rule was generally ignored.

A board of inquiry determined that the explosion originated in room No. 9, which was worked by miner James Wilson. He had drilled and placed his shots in the room and lit his fuses. One shot was "windy" and ignited the coal dust. The explosion passed into the entryway, igniting Wilson's powder keg and killing him. The explosion spread down the entryways and into adjoining rooms, exploding four or five kegs of powder belonging to other miners.

"The explosion caused little damage to the mine itself," Lomshek said. "The toll of this explosion would be in human terms."

Every doctor from Pittsburg and many from Girard, Litchfield and the surrounding area responded.

"The injured were cared for in the blacksmith shop along side the mine shaft," Lomshek said. "Thirteen wounded were treated there, many suffering from burns and from inhaling 'damp,' the noxious gases of the mine."

Each miner in the district was asked to donate 50 bushels of coal for aid to the victims' families, and a relief committee was formed to solicit aid for the survivors.

And, of course, the dead had to be buried. Lomshek said that the final resting places of 28 victims are known, including two mass graves in Pittsburg. At 11 a.m. on the Monday after the explosion, a Santa Fe train pulled out of Frontenac, flat cars loaded with coffins and passenger cars filled with grieving families.

"Seventeen of the coffins were unloaded and taken to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church," Lomshek said. "Due to the lack of space in the frame church, the caskets were left on the wagons outside while Father Zvacek conducted the services."

Following this, a procession was formed to take the remains to the new St. Mary's Cemetery south of town. It is now at the south edge of Highland Park Cemetery.

The train carrying the caskets, after dropping off the Catholic families, proceeded to the crossing nearest Mt. Olive Cemetery and the nine remaining caskets were unloaded there. Religious ceremonies were held with nearly 3,000 present.

Gradually, public memory faded and the two mass graves had no marker until Jeff Scott, Pittsburg, decided to make that his Eagle Scout project. Lomshek assisted with many hours of research, which he intends to place in the Leonard H. Axe Library, Genealogy Libraries at

Pittsburg Public Library and Columbus, and the Kansas Historical Society.

The first marker, at St. Mary's Cemetery, was dedicated on June 2, 2002. The second was dedicated April 4, 2005 at Mt. Olive Cemetery.

Each marker is engraved with the names of those buried there.

"The names were kind of hard to follow," Lomshek said. "The names were messed up so much in the immigration process that it was hard to find what was the true name."

There is another type of memorial as well — reforms in the coal mining industry. In mid-December, the state convention of miners, held in Pittsburg, sent a delegation to the Kansas governor urging that he appoint a practical miner as state mine inspector, and within a short time George W. Findley, inspector at the time of the disaster, was replaced by John T. Stewart, Scammon, a practical miner.

By late January 1889, John Herron, Cherokee, introduced a bill into the Kansas Legislature requiring the use of shot-firers in coal mines, with shots to be fired only once a day, after all miners had left the mine. This was passed by both branches of the legislature by the end of February.

"Despite their lying until recently in unmarked graves, their names now long forgotten, these miners' deaths had made a difference," Lomshek said.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

M

mundic A Cornish-derived word for iron pyrites.

O

open cut An excavation for the purpose of working an ore body or deposit that lies close to the surface. Sometimes called an 'open cast'.

- Ed.