

Mining Accident News No.0830

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Tuesday 18 November 2008

South Africa: Mineworker dies at De Beers' Finsch mine

Extract from *Forbes.com, NY, USA*

JOHANNESBURG – A mineworker died in an accident above ground at top diamond producer De Beers' Finsch mine in South Africa on Tuesday. A spokesman from the company said the mine would continue to operate.

De Beers spokesman Tom Tweedy confirmed the death and said a full investigation was underway but that the mine would not be shut.

'The nature and details of the accident will be subject of the comprehensive investigation' Tweedy said in an emailed statement.

The Solidarity trade union said in a statement that the accident occurred on the surface, when the worker was pinned between a wall and a vehicle following a collision.

The Finsch mine, a highly automated operation, is South Africa's largest underground diamond mine and produced 2.3 million carats of the approximately 15 million carats produced by De Beers in South Africa in 2007.

Mine unions and many other commentators say South Africa, the world's top source of platinum and major gold producer, has an appalling mine safety record. So far this year about 146 people have died in various incidents.

The government has routinely shut down mining operations temporarily after deaths occur, so that companies can probe the cause of the accidents and make safety improvements.

Unions have accused producers of chasing profits at the expense of lives. They want companies to spend even more on safety, but companies fear this may lead to spiralling costs.

The government has launched a nationwide mine audit to examine the level of safety compliance, expected to be presented to the president for review shortly. But Solidarity and other unions have accused the ministry of delaying it on purpose.

'It has already been 15 months since the audit was ordered, and in the meantime its release is being delayed unnecessarily,' Solidarity spokesman Jaco Kleynhans said.

'The danger now exists that the findings of the report could become outdated and invalid.'

Wednesday 19 November 2008

MSHA stands behind fines against coal producer

Extract from *Forbes.com, NY, USA*

The federal government agency that regulates mining says it stands behind the \$1.5 million in fines it levied last month against a coal producer now suing it.

American Coal Co.'s lawsuit against the Mine Safety and Health Administration was filed in

East St. Louis and accuses the U.S. Labor Department agency of abusive monitoring and issuing citations to satisfy quotas.

Last month's fines were for alleged safety violations at American Coal's Galatia mines in southern Illinois.

The company is part of Ohio-based Murray Energy, whose owner gained attention last year when nine people died in a Utah mine.

MSHA spokeswoman Amy Louviere says the agency stands strongly behind its action against American Coal "and will not be deterred from protecting miners' lives."

Thursday 20 November 2008

Miners' partners face more abuse: research

Extract from *ABC Online, Aus*

New university research shows that women with partners in Queensland's Bowen Basin's mining industry are up to three-and-a-half times more likely to suffer from controlling and possessive behaviour from their partner.

The Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research interviewed more than 500 women and found a higher incidence of social psychological abuse for women who have a partner in the mining industry.

The centre's director, Heather Nancarrow, says the problem could stem from the man working away from home.

"Women who are partnered to a man working in the mining industry were nearly two times more likely than other women to experience social psychological abuse. So that's the controlling, possessive jealousy behaviour," she said.

"But if the women were living in Mackay they reported a rate of violence three-and-a-half times higher than women in Mackay not partnered to a man in the mining industry."

Mine settlement fair 'by W.Va. standards,' Blankenship says

Trading Markets (press release), Los Angeles, CA, USA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A "very liberal" state court system forced Massey Energy to pay two widows of the Aracoma Alma No. 1 Mine fire an amount that is fair "by West Virginia standards," company CEO Don Blankenship said Wednesday.

Blankenship also said it made no sense for Logan Circuit Judge Roger Perry to allow the families of miners Don Bragg and Ellery Hatfield to sue him personally, and that Bragg and Hatfield may have "panicked" during their effort to evacuate the mine.

Bruce Stanley, a lawyer for the Bragg and Hatfield families, said, "We've had the unfortunate experience of hearing Mr. Blankenship's comments.

"We can only say that they demonstrate a special lack of grace," Stanley said. "Perhaps the widows can find it in their hearts to pray for him."

Blankenship made his remarks Wednesday morning during an appearance on the statewide radio show "Talkline," two days after Massey's Aracoma Coal Co. announced it would pay an undisclosed sum to settle a wrongful death case brought by the Bragg and Hatfield families.

"Outside of West Virginia, it's higher than it would be," Blankenship said when asked about the settlement. "But in West Virginia, of course, you have a very liberal system. So you have to take that into account when you're in those situations."

"I think by West Virginia standards, not by other standards, but by West Virginia standards, it's a fair amount," Blankenship said.

Delorce Bragg and Freda Hatfield had not only sued mine operator Aracoma Coal and parent firms Massey Energy and A.T. Massey Coal,

but also sought to hold Blankenship personally liable for the deaths.

Blankenship said the company acknowledged that a key mine ventilation wall was missing, allowing thick, black smoke from the fire to pour into the Aracoma Mine's primary escape tunnel.

"The two that didn't, for whatever reason, didn't get their masks on or panicked or whatever happened," Blankenship said. "I don't know that anybody knows 100 percent in the confusion. But clearly, they would have had a better escapeway had the stopping line not been violated."

A 12-miner crew, including Bragg and Hatfield, hit smoke on their way out of that primary escapeway. When the group tried to find another way out, Bragg and Hatfield somehow became separated from the rest of the crew. They got lost and eventually succumbed to the smoke.

But federal investigators found that both Bragg and Hatfield donned their emergency breathing devices.

Blankenship said Wednesday it was "really strange that the suit was allowed to continue with me personally being sued, because that's the purpose of corporations.

"It made no sense in my judgment or our lawyers' judgment," Blankenship said.

In a late September order, Judge Perry noted a 1992 decision by then-Supreme Court Justice Thomas B. Miller that found corporate officials could be found personally liable if they "participated in, approved of, sanctioned, or ratified" company wrongdoing.

Perry ruled that the widows should be able to show jurors dozens of Blankenship memos that might convince them that Blankenship "engendered a corporate attitude of indifference toward safety."

Blankenship's lawyer, Tom Flaherty, cautioned during an August hearing that "a finding of liability" on Blankenship's part "may indeed

have a chilling effect on the legal landscape and business climate of West Virginia," Perry wrote.

"There has been much studied and said concerning the disparaging legal and economic forces of West Virginia law -- the credibility of such is another question altogether -- and this court does not intend to comment on this issue," Perry wrote. "Whether the effect of the [1992 ruling] on this case does or does not have a damaging effect on West Virginia is not a proper matter for consideration for this court. The law stands as it is and must be followed."

During his radio appearance, Blankenship said that he would not personally be paying any of the settlement to the Aracoma widows.

But Massey has not yet resolved a legal dispute with Aracoma Coal's insurance company, American International Specialty Lines Insurance, which is part of American International Group, or AIG.

Two weeks before the Aracoma trial began, Aracoma sued AIG in Logan Circuit Court, alleging the insurer wrongly blocked a deal to settle the case within the limits of a \$20 million insurance policy. Aracoma alleged that AIG wanted other defendants in the case -- Massey, A.T. Massey and Blankenship -- to pay "all or a portion of" their \$10 million deductible under a separate general liability policy "before staking any further steps to resolve the claims against Aracoma."

USA: MSHA proposes \$210,000 in civil penalties against Guest Mountain Mining and Bresee Trucking

Source *U.S. Department of Labor*

ARLINGTON, Va., - Southwest Va.-based mine operator, contractor cited in serious trucking accident.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) today announced it has proposed \$165,000 in civil penalties against Bresee Trucking and \$45,000

against Guest Mountain Mining Corp. related to a vehicular accident in July 2008 that left a contract truck driver permanently disabled. Both companies are based in Wise County, Va.

"Federal law states that every miner is required - and entitled - to receive the necessary training to perform his job safely and correctly," said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "Due to inadequate training and faulty equipment, a miner has been seriously injured. The mine operator and contractor must be held accountable for their violation of the law."

On July 31, a driver employed by Bresee Trucking was seriously injured while watering the main haul road with a water truck. As he descended a steep grade, the driver missed a gear and accelerated downhill in neutral. He was unable to slow the truck due to a brake system malfunction. The truck left the road, crossed a ditch and decelerated rapidly in drainage sumps, causing the water tank to detach from the truck frame and slide onto the cab.

MSHA's accident investigators examined the brake system and discovered missing components and significant air leaks. Bresee Trucking was cited for failing to provide task training and hazard training to the driver, as well as failing to have adequate brakes equipped on its mobile equipment. The mine operator was cited for failure to provide hazard training.

Since January 2008, MSHA has assessed civil penalties for 170,000 citations totalling \$162 million against mine operators and contractors for violations of health and safety requirements.

SA: Man killed in Coober Pedy mining accident

Extract from adelaidenow.com, Adealaide, SA, Aus

A COOBER Pedy man who suffered serious injuries in a mining accident this afternoon has died.

The man, aged in his 50s, was injured about 2.15pm when he became caught in underground machinery at a field in Dead Man's Gully, about 20km north of Coober Pedy.

The man's workmates had pulled him from the mine when the town's Mine Rescue SES arrived at the scene.

He was taken to the Coober Pedy Hospital.

Mine Rescue SES Brian Underwood said the incident had saddened the close-knit Far North community.

"It's extremely sad, but unfortunately it's a part of life up here," he said.

"He's one of over 100 I've pulled up (from a mine) in my time."

Police are preparing a report for the Coroner and SafeWork SA are investigating the incident.

This week in mining accident history

Some noteworthy accidents	
21 Nov 1903 Hill Farm Mine, Dunbar, Pa, USA	Methane explosion underground coal mine 12 killed
21 Nov 1980 Lake Peigneur, Louisiana, USA	Salt mine flooded from oil rig drilling from surface 55 miners escape
21 Nov 2006 Halemba Mine Ruda Slaska, Poland	Gas explosion underground coal mine 23 deaths

Friday 21 November 2008

South African Parliament Passes Tough Mine Safety Law

Voting in Cape Town, South Africa's parliament today passed a new mine safety law that will raise penalties for mining companies and their executives, including holding CEOs criminally responsible for deaths in some of the world's deepest mines. The National Union of Mineworkers had campaigned for the law, but the mining companies called it "too punitive" and unconstitutional. If the law is finalized, potential fines against companies would rise from 200,000 rand to 1 million rand (\$93,900), and executives could be imprisoned for five years and fined as much as \$300,000.

South African mining is the world's top producer of platinum and responsible for producing 11.1 percent of the world's gold last year, The New York Times and Creamer Media's Mining Weekly magazine, which covers the South African mining industry, reported today. Last year, there were 221 deaths in South African mines -- up from 200 in 2006, according to *Mining Weekly*. The deaths are far fewer than was common in the country's mines in the early 1990s, but the deaths have prompted South Africa's government to temporarily shut down mining operations after fatal accidents, and mine unions have stopped work at mines whenever a death occurred, the magazine reported.

The new law will take effect if it is signed by South African President Kgalema Motlanthe. Besides higher penalties, the law would require mine accident investigations to begin within 10 days of an incident, with a report on the incident completed within 30 days.

USA: Mine still closed after accident

State wants better ventilation in portion of Whitetail mine

Extract from *Trading Markets.com*

A portion of the Whitetail Kittanning Mine near Newburg remains idle, following a Nov. 3 accident that sent two miners to a Pittsburgh burn centre.

Jama Jarrett, spokeswoman for the W.Va. Miners Health, Safety and Training in Charleston, said that office "has requested that the coal company take steps to ensure that the right amount of ventilation is available to deliver fresh air into the mine. Until these parameters are met, this area will remain closed," she said.

The victims, Paul Blake of Morgantown and Thomas Rosenberger of Bruceton Mills, were injured when methane gas in the mine ignited, causing a flash fire. Both have been released from the hospital, Jarrett said, and were interviewed by state investigators this week.

Results of the investigation have not been released, she said.

Amy Louviere, spokeswoman with the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, said MSHA had nothing new to release on its investigation into the explosion.

"From here on out, I don't expect to hear anything about the progress of the investigation. The team keeps those things pretty well under wraps until the final report is issued," she said in an e-mail.

The mine is operated by Kingwood Mining Company, a subsidiary of Alpha Natural Resources of Abingdon, Va.

NT: Workers contaminated at Ranger Mine, union says

Extract from AAP

DARWIN, NT, Aus- Workers from the controversial Ranger mine in the Northern Territory have been contaminated with uranium, a union says.

Worksafe has been called in to investigate the claims relating to the Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) mine, about 260km east of Darwin.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) spokesman Steve Milne said nine workers were asked to clean up a yellow cake spill three weeks ago.

Since then, some of the workers had tested positive for dangerous levels of uranium in their urine, he said.

"Some of them are on the lower end," he told ABC Radio.

"(But) one, I believe is about three times the acceptable standards of uranium exposure.

"Mind you, from our point of view, any form of exposure to uranium is a danger because uranium basically has some major consequences on a person's ongoing health."

Mr Milne said a vacuum machine could have been used instead of the workers to clean up the spill.

Dave Sweeney, from the Australian Conservation Foundation, said he had heard reports that up to 15 people had been exposed to elevated levels of uranium oxide.

"Workers dressed only in paper overalls and without the required monitoring devices were literally caked in uranium during the incident last month," he said in a statement.

"This is the latest in a long history of environmental and occupational leaks, spills, incidents and accidents."

But ERA business development manager David Paterson said any exposure to the uranium was within safe levels.

"All of their exposure was well below any safe levels of exposure to radiation," he told the ABC.

Earlier this week ERA announced it had found a potential further 40,000 tonnes of uranium oxide near the Ranger mine which could extend its life by seven years.

Surrounded by Kakadu National Park, it already produces 11 per cent of the world's uranium.

Mr Sweeney said the latest reports showed the mine was not run responsibly and it should not be allowed to expand its operation.

"This would be a massive burden on the Kakadu environment and cause massive long term pollution problems," he said.

"Today's news again shows that the company cuts corners and compromises environmental and human health."

A 2003 Senate Committee report found there had been 110 pollution incidents and numerous breaches of environmental requirements at the Ranger mine since 1981.

NSW Department of Primary Industries
View mine safety information, publications and safety alerts at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety

Monday 24 November 2008

China: Four trapped miners rescued after 80 hours

Extract from *China Daily, China*

LONGNAN, Jiangxi -- Four miners were rescued here shortly before 5 am on Monday, about 80 hours after a roof collapsed at a tungsten mine in east China's Jiangxi Province.

The four were in good condition, since rescuers had pumped air into the ventilation system and also sent down milk and water since Saturday noon, said the rescue headquarters at Hantan Tungsten Mine of Jiahua Village in Longnan County.

A search began on Thursday evening after co-workers realized the four were missing. The co-workers, suspecting a cave-in, tapped on the track leading to the shaft and heard the trapped miners knocking in response.

A rescue team of 150 people was summoned and eventually opened a 27-m tunnel to reach the trapped miners.

Death toll in Romanian mine blast rises to 13

Extract from *Reuters AlertNet, London, England, UK*

BUCHAREST - A Romanian miner died in hospital on Monday from burns sustained in a coal mine explosion earlier this month, raising the death toll from the accident to 13, doctors said.

The explosion at Petrila, a small town in Romania's remote Jiu Valley mining region, took place nearly 1,000 metres (3,280 feet) underground on Nov. 15. Local media reported that the blast was caused by an accumulation of gas.

"The patient had burns covering nearly his entire body," Bogdan Oprita, a spokesman for the Floreasca hospital in Bucharest, was quoted as saying by Realitatea TV.

The mine's management was suspended pending an investigation. The raised death toll

almost matches the 14 who died in 2001 in the worst accident in Romania's outdated mining industry since the 1989 fall of communism.

Mining was once a thriving industry employing almost half a million people in Romania and miners were a feared political force in the 1990s. But the industry has struggled to compete against cheaper Russian coal and to keep customers in a more energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly age.

Restructuring has closed many mines and the Jiu Valley is now an isolated area plagued by environmental degradation and badly in need of investment.

Five dead in explosion at illegal Ukraine coal mine

Press release by *Earthtimes, London, UK*

Kiev - An underground explosion killed five Ukrainians attempting to remove coal and scrap metal from an abandoned mine, a Ministry of Emergency Situations official said Monday. The blast took place in a locked-down shaft near the village Trubne, in the eastern Luhansk province.

It was not immediately clear whether the victims died in the explosion or the ensuing below-ground fire, Channel 5 television reported.

Investigating police said a methane gas buildup and unsafe use of metal objects was a probable cause of the explosion.

All five had been area residents, and the shaft had been targeted by illegal miners in the past, Channel 24 television reported.

The victims reportedly armed with picks and shovels overcame locks and barriers in order to break into the mine. A spark caused by digging may have triggered the explosion, according to the report.

Ukraine's government operates some of the world's deepest and most dangerous coal mines, and has been hard-pressed to close all but the worst of the pits because of unemployment fears.

The former Soviet republic's depressed metals industry has nonetheless shed tens of thousands of jobs in recent months. Some unemployed coal miners have resorted to mining the closed shafts illegally in order to support their families.

Two killed at New World Resources' Czech mine

Extract from *miningweekly.com, Toronto, Canada*

Two Polish miners were fatally injured on Saturday at the Karvina coal mine, in the Czech Republic, LSE-listed New World Resources (NWR) said in a statement.

The miners died after a geological tremor about 710 km below surface. The mine is owned by NWR subsidiary OKD.

There were 21 miners in the area when the tremor occurred, but a rescue team was dispatched and led the other 19 workers out of the area, the company said.

An investigative committee comprised of members of the Ostrava Mining Authority, Karvina mine management, OKD management, the local police and trade unions is now conducting an investigation into the accident.

Mining in the affected area of the mine has been suspended and the area sealed off until the conclusion of the investigation.

Mining in other areas of Karvina Mine continues without restrictions.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

P

paddock / paddocking A portion of an alluvial area being worked by ground or box sluicing, usually the latter. Also an area for storing washdirt or ore, which was said to be 'at grass'. 'Paddocking' meant to systematically work a small claim on alluvial flats by a series of paddocks. The paddock was rectangular in shape and at larger claims could measure 20m x 20m.

- Ed.