
Mining Accident News No.0831

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Tuesday 25 November 2008

South Africa: New laws hold mining bosses criminally liable for deaths

Extract from dispatch.co.za (*Dispatchonline*), South Africa

NEW laws which will hold mining chief executives criminally liable for the death of any workers have been cheered by unions but slammed by the executives.

The new mine safety laws, which enforce stricter penalties, were approved by Parliament last week but must still be signed by President Kgalema Motlanthe before becoming effective.

Motlanthe has 10 days from last Friday to sign them.

The new laws also make provision for mine accident investigations to be held within 10 days and a report completed within 30 days.

The new laws are what the Chamber of Mines president Sipho Nkosi referred to earlier this month as an “imposition of a liability of a most oppressive nature”.

The new laws make provision for heavier penalties to be levied against companies, increasing fines from R200000 to R1million.

“An extremely damaging consequence of these Draconian proposals – should they be

implemented – is that the South African mining industry will lose the services of a considerable number of highly skilled managerial and supervisory employees,” said Nkosi.

“This is particularly true in our country, which has the world’s deepest underground operations. Many will choose to export their skills to somewhere else in the world where they are not faced with the threat of imprisonment and inflationary fines for events over which they have no realistic control.”

According to Frans Baleni, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), CEOs will be charged with industrial culpable homicide, but only if the CEO or mine manager is found guilty of causing an unsafe working environment.

Lesiba Seshoka, NUM spokesperson, said: “We are excited that we can now see a chief executive of a mine going to rot in jail for unsafe mining ... all those who used to force workers to work under dangerous conditions will now face the music.”

Jaco Kleynhans, spokesperson for trade union Solidarity, welcomed the new laws and said they were what unions had been asking for. “This country needs more mining regulations because mining companies had a lot of time in the past to improve safety levels in mines.”

A mine executive, who asked not to be named, said: “These new laws are unrealistic in many ways.

“For instance, if an inspector closes a mine after rendering it unsafe, we are still battling to see how he would later retract such actions because it would obviously hamper the overall mine administration.

“Another problem is that this will make it very difficult for mining companies to retrain the senior skilled work force because of the fear of incrimination, regardless of one’s efforts towards safe mining.”

Accident turns spotlight on Romanian mining conditions

Extract from Southeast European Times, Bucharest

As Romania reels from this month's catastrophe at the Petrila mines, increased scrutiny is focusing on the practices of the mining industry. Critics speak of warnings ignored and pressure on miners to return to unsafe workplaces.

The November 15th blasts in Romania's Jiu Valley represented the worst such incident in the country since 2001. A concentration of methane gas led to two explosions, with the second one decimating rescue crews who had responded to the first.

Eight miners and four rescue workers died on the scene, while dozens were hospitalised with burns. A 13th miner died while in hospital on Monday (November 24th), ten days after the accident.



A deadly buildup of methane gas caused twin explosions at the Petrila mines on November 15th. [Getty Images]

"We don't have to continue killing people in the mines," President Traian Basescu said as he visited the accident site. He called on authorities to improve working conditions.

A hearing is reviewing complaints by victims' relatives that management already knew of the problems in the mine in the days before the explosions, with some miners already having

suffered burns. Prosecutors cross-examined managers at the National Coal Company (CNH) in Petrosani.

According to a Realitatea TV report, miners told their supervisors of their concerns but had to return to work anyway. Marian Holban, a miners' union leader, has filed a complaint with local police, alleging that he received death threats after having appeared on a TV show to discuss poor working conditions in the mining sector.

Economy Minister Varujan Vosganian has suspended the CNH management until the investigation is complete. He also wants an inquiry into state subsidies. Official figures show CNH has accumulated 1.3 billion euros in debt to the state, making it the largest such debtor.

The Romanian government has allocated financial aid for the victims' families -- 2,600 euros for the relatives of those killed or severely injured and 1,300 euros for the other wounded.

Bucharest will issue special student grants to the 13 children whose fathers died last week in the mining accident. County authorities and the CNH have also pledged substantial financial support.

Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, meanwhile, cautions against drawing premature conclusions. "We have to wait for the results of the inquiry and avoid speculation until then," he said.

The last accident at Petrila occurred in 1982, during the Ceausescu era, and was just as severe. Fourteen miners died and 15 were injured.

Wednesday 26 November 2008

USA: Mining Accident in Boone county

Extract from MetroNews, W.Va, USA

A worker at a Boone County coal preparation plant is being treated at a Charleston hospital after suffering an injury Wednesday morning.

The state Mine Safety Office says the contract worker was replacing screens at Elk Run Coal's prep plant when he was struck in the chest by an unidentified object. He was taken by helicopter to the hospital.

State investigators closed the part of the plant where the accident took place so they could begin an investigation.

The Elk Run Coal Company is a subsidiary of Massey Energy.

Thursday 27 November 2008

NSW: Miners injured in electrical incident

Extract from Australian Mining, Aus

Two men have received flash burns at BHP Billiton Illawarra Coal's West Cliff coal mine in an incident involving an electrical transformer. Both men were transported to hospital following the incident.

One man has been released from hospital, while the other remains at Concord hospital for treatment, according to an Illawarra Coal spokesperson.

Operations at the mine have resumed, the spokesperson said.

New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (DPI) spokesperson Jenny Ward told MINING DAILY that some media reports released following the incident were alarmist.

One report said that an underground explosion had occurred at the mine, when in fact the incident was not a blast, but an arc from a transformer, according to Ward.

The incident is said to have shut down booster fans which forced the mine to close for about 25 hours.

The DPI is investigating this morning and a report on the incident will be released in the coming weeks.

This week in mining accident history

Some noteworthy accidents	
20 Nov 1894 Blanch Mine Scotland, UK	Mine explosion 7 killed
24 Nov 2003 Sundian Coal Mine Henan Province, China	Underground gas explosion 23 killed
25 Nov 1941 Blaenclydach Mine, Wales, UK	Explosion underground 7 killed
28 Nov 1929 Werbwll Colliery, Penclawdd, Wales, UK	Underground explosion & afterdamp 7 dead
28 Nov 1938 Cinder Pit, Blaenfon, Wales UK	Mine flooded after torrential rain and heavy snow 11 men, 2 girls & 1 boy killed
29 Nov 1933 Kames Colliery, Muirkirk, UK	Fall of coal causing fatal head injuries 1 killed

USA: Mine 'bounce' injures 5

Extract from Montrose Daily Press

PAONIA — Part of the Bowie coal mine was shut down temporarily Tuesday (11/25) as the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration investigated a "bounce" that injured five miners.

The accident occurred Monday evening along the B7 longwall headgate at the Bowie No. 2 mine near Paonia. According to a news release from Bowie Resources, LLC, the miners were taken to Delta Memorial Hospital where four were treated and released. A fifth miner had to be taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction; the release did not give the miners' names and their conditions weren't known.

A spokesman from the Mine Safety and Health Administration confirmed MSHA was investigating the incident, and said the mine was closed temporarily as part of standard federal procedure.

Geological pressure causes the ground to shift. Such shifting can stress the coal pillars left to support underground workings, according to information from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The pillar can then rupture, spewing rock and coal with sufficient force to kill miners.

According to NIOSH, one miner dies every other year due to coal bounces and an average of two miners per year are seriously injured. At a Pitkin County mine in 1981, a bounce killed 15 miners and injured three.

MSHA was investigating Tuesday to determine whether anything could've prevented the Bowie bounce and resultant injuries. The MSHA spokesman said agency staff members were on the ground at the mine, including technical support teams. "We're trying to determine what the causes were," he said.

The mine has been in operation since 1997.

Saturday 29 November 2008

USA: \$210,000 in MSHA Fines for Wreck Caused by Brake Failure

Sourced from OHSONline.com

It's not unusual to see dirty, poorly maintained watering and equipment trucks at some job sites. A West Virginia company may be paying a high price for such machinery, however, and an employee of the firm is now permanently disabled as a result, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration. MSHA has proposed \$165,000 in civil penalties against Bresee Trucking and \$45,000 against Guest Mountain Mining Corp. from an accident on July 31, 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 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."

MSHA said the driver, who was employed by Bresee, was watering a main haul road from 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," the agency said. "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."

So far this year, MSHA has issued \$162 million in civil penalties with 170,000 citations.

Monday 1 December 2008

15 miners confirmed dead in NE China coal mine blast

Extract from *Xinhua, China*

HARBIN, - Rescuers said Monday morning they had found the bodies of all the 15 miners trapped in Sunday's colliery blast in Qitaihe City, Heilongjiang Province.

The explosion occurred at around 4:50 p.m. Sunday when 25 people were working in the coal mine. Ten of them managed to escape, leaving the 15 trapped underground.

The cause of the blast is still under investigation in Changlong coal mine, which has legal operation license and an annual production capacity of 40,000 tons.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

P

panel The section of the mine where production has or is taking place (common coal mining term).

- Ed.