

Mining Accident News No.0913

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Friday 17 April 2009

China: 8 die in explosives warehouse blast at coal mine in Hunan

Extract from China.org.cn

At least eight people died and five others were injured in a blast Friday at a detonator and dynamite warehouse at a coal mine in Chenzhou City of central China's Hunan Province, a local official said.

Xie Guanghui, head of the Yongxing County government in Chenzhou, told Xinhua that rescuers did not know if more people were buried in the rubble.

The blast occurred at 3:30 PM at the Qingshanbei mine.

South Africa: Worker killed at AngloGold's Moab Khotsong mine

Extract from Mining Weekly.com

TORONTO – A mineworker died on Friday morning at AngloGold Ashanti's Moab Khotsong mine, near Klerksdorp, in South Africa, the company reported later in the day.

Patrick Sinono, a miner's assistant, was fatally injured in a "fall of ground incident" while barring at a stope face.

No other employees were injured in the incident, AngloGold said.

Sunday 19 April 2009

Methane blast kills 12 in Iranian mine

Extract from PRESS TV, Tehran, Iran

A gas explosion has torn through a coalmine near the town of Zarand in the southern Iranian province of Kerman, killing 12 people.

Following investigations, Zarand's governor Hassan Rahmani described a buildup of methane gas as the cause of the explosion.

Rahmani said the blast happened at midday, adding that 12 miners were killed.

"Two victims have been taken out from under the rubble and the rest of the bodies will be recovered in a few hours," Rahmani told IRNA.

Iran's Minister of Mine and Industries Ali-Akbar Mehrabian said the ministry has dispatched a rescue team to the location of the blast to further investigate the incident.

The high concentration of methane in mines makes them especially dangerous.

Earlier in 2005, an explosion at the same mine in Kerman killed 9 people.

Monday 20 April 2009

Worker faked mine reports, state says

Extract from Louisville Courier-Journal, KY, USA

HAZARD, Ky. — For at least a year, Betty Sue Whitaker allegedly lived a lie that threatened coal miners' health and safety, as well as the reputation of the state agency that employed her.

But even after determining that Whitaker had falsified more than two dozen inspection reports — pretending to evaluate workers at mines that she visited briefly or not at all — the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet allowed her to resign last month without making her repay the thousands of dollars in salary it had concluded she did not earn.

The cabinet also has not asked a prosecutor to review the case for possible criminal charges, despite one official's earlier suggestion that such a referral might be appropriate.

Whitaker, a former miner and coal-company employee, had worked as a safety analyst in the Hazard district of the state's Office of Mine Safety and Licensing since July 1999.

Her primary responsibility was to prevent accidents and fatalities by observing and assessing miners' work habits, then submitting detailed reports on her findings to her supervisors.

But the state alleged that in late 2007 and throughout last year, Whitaker rarely visited any the mines she claimed to have inspected, instead concocting phony reports and forging company officials' signatures on them.

And she escaped detection, the state found, in part because coal-company officials who knew of her absences from their mines did not report them, and because her longtime former supervisor either did not notice or challenge what she was doing.

During a recent, brief but profanity-laden telephone interview from her Perry County home, the 50-year-old Whitaker insisted that she did her job and resigned because of an array of physical ailments that rendered her barely able to walk.

"The state's full of crap," she said. "They're just full of crap. I did not falsify nothing."

When state investigators sought to interview Whitaker in late December, she told them she was on medication and her "nerves" would not allow her to talk with them, according to their 20-page report, a copy of which was obtained by The Courier-Journal from the Office of Mine Safety and Licensing.

Late warning signs

The alleged fraud came to light late last fall, when David Mullins, Whitaker's new boss, found several troubling items in a report she had just submitted on the Perry County Coal Corp.'s E4-1 mine.

In the report, Whitaker stated that she had observed two miners who, Mullins knew, couldn't have been there when she said she inspected the operation.

One had been suspended for a drug violation and was no longer employed by the company; the other was in the hospital after breaking a bone in his neck a day earlier. And the report was signed with the name of a foreman who was not working at the E4-1 mine.

Two days later, Mullins — who had been in charge of the mining office's Hazard district for only about two months — was at the E4-1 mine asking questions, including: Has anyone seen Betty Whitaker lately?

The answers Mullins got led him to share his concerns with state mining officials in Frankfort. The full investigation they ordered ultimately found that Whitaker had "completely fabricated"

26 reports last year and at least three more in 2007.

Those reports, some a dozen or more pages in length, spoke of personal contacts Whitaker supposedly had with scores of miners, who were listed by name.

The documents recounted the conditions underground that Whitaker said she'd noted, the unsafe acts she'd allegedly observed, the training records she'd purportedly audited, the safety meetings she claimed to have held.

Was ventilation adequate? Did equipment have excessive amounts of oil and grease? Was the roof-control plan being followed? Was the mine clean, and rock-dusted well? Did company personnel know how to properly sample for the presence of potentially explosive gases?

Whitaker noted all that, and more. But the state determined that it was bogus, leading investigators to recommend that the reports be purged from state records.

The investigators also found that Whitaker submitted to the state more than 1,200 hours she had not worked and received more than \$33,000 in salary she had not earned.

They also concluded that her neglect had placed miners at "greater risk of being seriously injured or killed."

The consequences

Based on those findings, the cabinet's deputy secretary, Henry List, told Whitaker in a Feb. 16 letter that she would be fired.

"Your conduct may have irreparably damaged the integrity of the Office of Mine Safety and Licensing," List wrote. He also raised the possibility that Whitaker's conduct was criminal and warranted review by prosecutors.

Whitaker resigned during her pre-termination hearing March 2.

In response to questions from the newspaper about the state's handling of the case, cabinet spokesman Dick Brown said in a recent e-mail that there was no agreement to forgo a criminal investigation in exchange for Whitaker's resignation.

There is "nothing further to be gained by seeking prosecution," Brown said. "She (Whitaker) resigned, rather than face termination. That, in and of itself, is appropriate punishment."

Brown also said the state has no plans to seek repayment of the salary investigators concluded she had fraudulently collected: "We believe our time is better spent concentrating on providing a safe working environment for Kentucky coal miners."

Curtis Hall, Mullins' predecessor in the mining agency's Hazard office, was Whitaker's boss for more than seven years until he retired last July — a few months before Mullins began checking into Whitaker's work.

Hall initially consented to an interview with the newspaper, but said the next day that he had changed his mind. Instead, he sent an e-mail saying that he had not been "officially made aware" of the allegations against Whitaker, and that "my ministry and family has been my main focus since my retirement."

Coal companies knew

The state's report also contains an assertion by Rick Campbell, superintendent at the Leeco 68 mine, that he had informed Mike Eldridge, an inspector in the mining agency's Hazard office, "about not having an analyst here for eight months."

But the report does not say when he told Eldridge, or what, if anything, Eldridge did about it.

Campbell and Eldridge declined to be interviewed, and Brown wouldn't comment on the matter.

"We are not going to discuss what someone may or may not have said or heard as off-handed comments in regards to this case," he said.

The report also indicates that besides Campbell, more than a dozen other coal company officials and supervisors told investigators that they knew Whitaker had not been doing her job.

For example, Don Hacker, a Perry County Coal Corp. official, said Whitaker had been to the company's E3-1 mine just once during the past year. That visit occurred after the state's investigation began.

And Larry Begley, superintendent of the ICG Flint Ridge No. 2 mine, said: "I do not know of her ever going underground here," according to the report.

Whitaker said that Hacker, Begley and the other company officials were lying about her because mine inspectors and analysts "piss off everybody ... by makin' them do their job."

She concluded the conversation by stating: "They're every one full of shit, OK? And that's all I've got to say."

Then she hung up.

Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal Association, asserted in an interview that company personnel had no responsibility to report Whitaker's prolonged absences, even though they may have compromised safety.

"I don't think the operator has any obligation. I think the state has the obligation to send them (analysts) out," Caylor said, adding: "There are so many inspectors on a regular basis, maybe they (the operators) didn't notice."

But Tony Oppeward, a Lexington attorney and a former federal and state mine-safety official, said that while coal companies probably had no legal obligation to inform the state about Whitaker, "if they were concerned about mine safety, that would have been the proper thing to do. They have a moral obligation."

He also contends that miners in Eastern Kentucky "are already taught by operators that inspectors are their enemies, that inspectors are trying to shut the mine down and put them out of a job. So when you have a corrupt inspector, that reinforces the stereotype that inspectors can't be trusted. Miners feel there's no one they can turn to."

Quote of the week

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.

Mahatma Gandhi

Tuesday 21 April 2009

USA: 3 injured in White County coal mine accident

Extract from www.courierpress.com, Evansville, Ill, USA

It was reported that three people were injured in an accident this morning at the Pattiki coal mine southeast of Carmi, White County in Illinois. The mine is operated by White County Coal LLC.

Sgt. Byrd Huber said he had no information on the accident itself, but that deputies were called to the accident scene and helped load three accident victims into ambulances. The call came in about 7.00am.

He said that the injuries were serious but that he did not know if they were considered life-threatening.

A fatality underground due to rib spall occurred at the Pattiki Mine on 26 January 2000.

Wednesday 22 April 2009

Eight killed in Colombia gold mine collapse

Extract from Earthtimes (press release), London, UK

Bogota - At least eight miners died and four others were injured in the collapse of a gold mine in northwest Colombia, officials said Tuesday. Victor Tamayo, governor of Choco province, said the mine was located in a remote, jungle region about four hours from the nearest city.

In a separate incident in the same province, the Attorney General's office confiscated 24 dredges used in illegal gold-mining operations without permits that caused environmental degradation.

The office said the machinery was seized at several points along the Quito River, in the municipalities of Paimado and Manugru.

The Ministry of Mines and Energy reported that 400 hectares of forest were destroyed this year by illegal gold-mining, and that 3.7 tons of mercury had been dumped into the soil and rivers, endangering public health and the environment.

This week in mining accident history

Date Mine / Country (Aust unless stated)
<p>20 April 1945 Balmain Colliery, Birchgrove, Sydney, NSW Underground coal mine and natural gas Source: <i>Wikipedia</i></p>
Incident
<p>The Balmain Colliery was a coal mine located in Birchgrove in the inner-west of Sydney, in the state of New South Wales, Australia. It produced coal from 1897 until 1931 and natural gas until 1945. It remains the deepest coal mine ever to have been sunk in Australia.</p> <p>The colliery was located on the northern side of the Balmain Peninsular, on the corner of Birchgrove Road and Water Street, next to Birchgrove Public School.</p>

Three fatal accidents took place during at the mine site:

On 17 March 1900, six miners were being lowered down the Birthday shaft. At 1,424 feet the bucket they were traveling in caught on a projection, tipped over and five of the six men fell to their death in the shaft. As a result of this accident, the *Mining Act* was amended to provide guide rails in shafts to prevent bucket swinging or overturning.

In 1932, a year after the mine closed, a six inch bore was sunk below the Birthday shaft to pipe Natural Gas to the surface. During the sinking of the bore, two men were killed when the gas ignited and exploded.

During the sealing of the Birthday shaft on **20 April 1945**, a rudimentary test was being undertaken which ignited escaping gas and caused an explosion below the seal. The company manager and two men were killed in the accident and another two men injured.



Balmain Colliery, Birthday Shaft. c1940s.

Friday 24 April 2009

TAS: Beaconsfield mine disaster family sues

Extract from ABC News Online, Aus

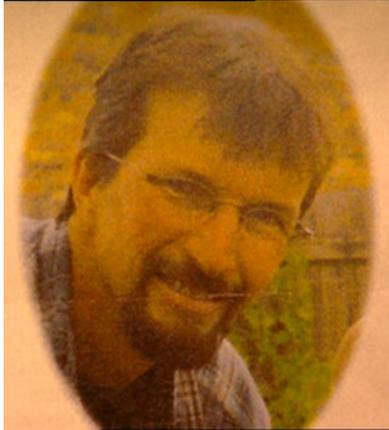
The family of the man killed in the Beaconsfield mine disaster in northern Tasmania is suing the mine's owner for damages.

The action is being taken under the Tasmanian Fatal Accidents Act.

Tomorrow marks the third anniversary of the death of Larry Knight who was killed in a rockfall at the mine on Anzac Day 2006.

Two colleagues, Brant Webb and Todd Russell were trapped underground for two weeks and then rescued amid much fanfare.

The mine's owner Beaconsfield Gold says Larry Knight's family are now seeking damages for his death.



Mr Knight's family is seeking damages. (ABC News)

Their lawyers will have to prove Mr Knight died because of a wrongful act, neglect or a default on the part of the company.

In its quarterly statement to the Australian Securities Exchange, the company says it is fully indemnified by its workers compensation insurer against the claim.

An inquest found the mine's owners were not directly responsible for Mr Knight's death.

NSW: Miners culture blamed for workplace deaths

THE NEW South Wales Government's Mine Safety Advisory Council says is trying to foster a zero harm culture among miners.

The Council's chairman Norman Jennings says industry officials have agreed at 2008 summit on mine safety that reaching world leading health and safety culture in the mining industry is the way to improve safety.

Jennings claims that this approach should be undertaken as opposed to looking at the purely technical ways of making work safer.

The Council has established a working party which will examine and assess some of the

particular issues that the group will move forward on.

Sunday 26 April 2009

UPDATE South Africa: Harmony says two trapped mine workers found dead

Extract from Reuters

JOHANNESBURG, - Two trapped workers at a South African gold mine have been found dead, Harmony Gold Mining said on Sunday.

The No. 5 gold producer stopped production at its Tshepong mine after the workers were trapped by a rock fall on Thursday. The company said it could not comment on production for now.

"We are deeply saddened that our rescue efforts resulted in the recovery of the two bodies," Chief Executive Graham Briggs said in a statement.

"Our teams, together with teams from other mines, worked around the clock to find the two employees and we remained optimistic that we would be able to rescue them."

The company said on its website that the mine, near Odendaalsrus, produced 273,119 ounces of gold in Harmony's 2008 fiscal year.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

R

reef A well-defined vein of mineralised ore.



Octahedral Gold crystals attached together, specimen from California

- Ed.