

# Mining Accident News No.0810

Monday 16 June 2008

## Coal miner killed in eastern Pa. USA accident

MOUNT CARMEL, PA. - A coal miner died Monday morning from injuries sustained in an underground roof collapse at an eastern Pennsylvania mine, state and federal officials said.



A man opens the gate for a police car at the Harmony Mine on Monday.

The accident happened at about 10:15 a.m. at the Harmony Mine near Mount Carmel, about 90 miles northwest of Philadelphia, said Tom Rathbun, a spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

No other injuries were reported.

The miner, who was not immediately identified, was trapped deep in a tunnel and partially covered by debris, Rathbun said. Fellow miners pulled him out before he was airlifted to a regional hospital.

An official with the federal **Mine Safety and Health Administration** said the miner was initially conscious and speaking, but died later.

State and federal inspectors are investigating the accident. The mine is owned by UAE Coal Corp. Associates.

The miner's death is the third coal mine related death in Pennsylvania and the 15th nationwide this year, according to MSHA

## Government Steps Up Coal Mine Safety Plan

**More Than 300 Inspectors Hired Over The Last Two Years Will Search Mines After Tragedies In W. Va. And Utah**

The federal agency responsible for mine safety has hired more than 300 inspectors over the past two years to scour the nation's underground coal operations for unsafe working conditions.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration has been beefing up its work force in an effort to increase inspections after a series of mining disasters from West Virginia to Utah.

A report last year by the inspector general found that MSHA had failed to carry out inspections at 107 of the 731 underground coal mines operating in 2006, or 15 percent of the total.



The federal agency responsible for mine safety has hired more than 300 inspectors over the past two years to scour the nation's underground coal operations for unsafe working conditions.

Forty-seven miners were killed on the job in 2006, one of the deadliest for miners in more than a decade. Six miners and three attempting rescues also died in 2007 at the Utah Crandall Canyon mine, while 15 mining fatalities have been reported nationwide since Jan. 1.

MSHA chief Richard Stickler said Monday the agency has 750 inspectors with the 322 new hires. But, because of resignations and retirements, the new hires represent a net increase of 163 inspectors.

Stickler said he also has embarked on a plan to ensure inspectors complete required visits to

every coal mine in the nation, aided by \$10 million earmarked for overtime pay this year.

"We're doing everything we can to see that we make all the mandated inspections," he said.

Mine safety advocate Tony Oppegard, a Lexington lawyer, said that without additional inspectors, MSHA had been unable to meet a federal requirement to visit each mine four times annually.

"It was an absolute necessity that they add additional inspectors," he said. "In my view, the best days that coal miners have underground are the days that inspectors are underground."

Stickler said inspectors have been logging about 35,000 hours of overtime each quarter to conduct inspections and ensure compliance with a sweeping federal safety law enacted in 2006.

Designed to better protect the 43,000 workers at underground coal mines, the law mandates larger stockpiles of emergency air packs. It also gives MSHA until June to require wireless communications and tracking equipment underground, among other measures.

Stickler said technology hasn't yet developed to the point of providing reliable wireless communication between underground workplaces and the surface after cave-ins or explosions.

The agency also is studying a proposal to require coal operators to install airtight emergency refuges underground. The refuges would have to be equipped with enough air, water and survival basics to keep miners alive at least four days while awaiting rescue.

MSHA estimates that the proposal, if implemented, would cost the coal industry between \$84.1 million and \$102.6 million in the first year and between \$38.7 million and \$43.3 million a year after that.

Regular reports of accidents are raising concerns about safety.

Tuesday 17 June 2008

## **Qld: Ombudsman hands down mine safety report**

BRISBANE - The Queensland ombudsman has criticised the state's mine safety inspectorate for poor record-keeping and being too close to the industry.

Releasing a report today, ombudsman David Bevan said the Queensland Mines Inspectorate (QMI), responsible for mine safety regulation, was not recording compliance and safety activities at mines, which could create an incomplete picture of a mine's safety.

"This could lead to some safety concerns not being followed up," Mr Bevan told reporters in Brisbane.

"The information should be recorded on a central database so that reports could be produced on how safety concerns have been dealt with at particular mine sites."

Mr Bevan said he did not find specific examples of inspectors being influenced improperly by the mining industry.

But there was a "reasonable perception QMI is subject to inappropriate influence" from the mining industry and state government mines department officials, he said.

Mr Bevan initiated the review after media reports and mining academics criticised the industry last year.

The Queensland Mines and Quarries Safety Performance and Health Report for 2006-07 released in December last year showed a rise in the number and severity of injuries and a massive hike in the reporting of near-misses, or high-potential incidents.

Four mine workers died on Queensland mine sites last financial year, compared with two in the previous year.

The number of injuries requiring medical treatment for the financial year rose from 758 to 1,132, while the number of high-potential incidents reported rose from 839 to 1,128.

Mr Bevan found mines inspectors most often used informal means to address safety problems, rather than formal directives.

This was because formal directives involved more paperwork and possibly going to court.

Informal directions also ensured advice could be negotiated with the mine operator, making it more likely to be complied with.

"As inspectors are encouraged to use informal options by management, a culture has developed that the informal approach is generally the preferable one," Mr Bevan said in the report.

But the ombudsman said that while this informal method was understandable, it could lead to problems down the track.

"In one case we examined during our audit, we noted a recommendation made to an operator, relating to apparently serious electrical safety issues, in respect of which there was no record of QMI having followed the matter up for five years," he wrote.

"At the time of our audit, 10 years after the concern was raised by the inspector, the regional office was not able to track with any certainty what had happened."

He said the situation meant the state's Department of Mines and Energy (DME) "chronically under-reports its inspection and compliance activities and is vulnerable to criticism that it routinely fails to enforce mine safety legislation".

"This is because the only enforcement activity on the public record is the number of prosecutions undertaken by the DME, and these are few and far between," the ombudsman reported.

Thursday 19 June 2008

## **United Mine Workers pans MSHA proposal allowing coal mines to keep ventilating with belt air**

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Coal mines could continue what critics call the dangerous practice of using conveyer belt tunnels to pump fresh air underground under new rules proposed by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Flame-resistant belts, fire prevention and detection in belt tunnels and federal approval also would be required under rules MSHA published in the Federal Register on Thursday.

"The objective of this proposed rule is to improve mine safety by significantly reducing the hazard of conveyor belt fires in underground coal mines," MSHA director Richard Stickler said in a statement.

Banning belt air outright would do even better, United Mine Workers spokesman Phil Smith said.

"We've always maintained that the Mine Act says that you can't use belt air," he said. "We believe it's a dangerous practice as demonstrated at Aracoma."

A National Mining Association spokesman did not immediately return calls for comment.

The proposal is required by federal legislation passed after high-profile accidents in 2006 that killed 19 miners, including two in a belt fire at West Virginia's Aracoma Alma No. 1 Mine.

Smith said the proposal seems to violate that legislation by requiring that belts be merely fire-resistant, rather than nonflammable.

"The MINER Act calls for non-flammability of the belts. That's not what's in the rule, or at least that's not what's in the press release," he said. "It means it won't burn. To us, that's very important."

Additionally, the UMW is concerned that MSHA has ignored a Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2006 requirement that mines demonstrate that using belt air will improve safety, Smith said. "There is no indication that the proposed rule actually mandates that."

Wednesday 25 June 2008

## WA: Driver trapped after mine crash

PERTH - A mineworker lay trapped for six hours in a wrecked truck after it crashed into a bulldozer at a Western Australian mine.

Police say the truck slammed into the stationary bulldozer at 6.30pm (WST) yesterday at the Mercator gold mine near Meekatharra, 640km northeast of Perth.

The bulldozer was turned sideways by the impact but its 34-year-old driver escaped with minor injuries.

However, the dozer's ripper arm pierced the truck, trapping the 61-year-old driver by his legs in the cabin for six hours, ABC Radio reported.

Emergency workers eventually freed the man, who was taken first to Meekatharra hospital and then flown to the Royal Perth Hospital, where he remained in a critical condition today.

The 705 disabling injuries in the WA mining sector in 2006-2007 were up by 199 on the previous year, WA's Department of Consumer and Employment Protection said.

Thursday 26 June 2008

## SA: Safety checks urged for mining industry

ADELAIDE - The mining industry has been urged to review safety procedures for exploratory drilling after a worker was injured in South Australia.

SafeWork SA said a worker on a drill site on Yorke Peninsula suffered upper body and pelvic injuries yesterday after being struck by a pipe and lifted two metres into the air.

He was a member of a contract drilling team working on a private property and was airlifted to the Royal Adelaide Hospital for treatment.

SafeWork SA inspectors issued a prohibition notice on the drill rig and opened a formal investigation.

Executive director Michele Patterson said the current surge in mineral exploration activity in South Australia must not be accompanied by a rise in work-related injuries.

"We understand that business is booming in the drilling industry, but taking shortcuts on safety in this type of work is simply asking for trouble," she said.

"Given the size of the machinery being operated, the amount of movement involved and the varying site conditions, drilling teams face many safety hazards that need to be very tightly managed."

## DPI Mechanical Engineering Safety Seminar

The **18th Mechanical Engineering Safety Seminar** will be held at the Waterview Convention Centre, Sydney Olympic Park, on Wednesday 13 and Thursday 14 August 2008.

For more information:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/minerals/safety/resources/seminars-and-conferences/mechanical-engineering-safety-seminar>

## Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

### H

**heapstead** The name sometimes given to the *pit-head* structures at the top of an inclined coal mine tunnel, housing the *tippler*, *screens* and *picking belt*. At some coal fields the term *brace* seems to have been extended to this structure.

**Huntington Mill** A machine for crushing ore in use from the 1890s. Operated as a centrifugal roller mill, with steel rollers rotating against the side of a cylindrical iron pan. Carried out the same functions as the stamper battery, and though by no means as common, is still found either complete or in pieces on some sites.

- Ed.