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# Mining Accident News No.0901

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## Friday 2 January 2009

### **USA: New mine safety rules reduce accident chances**

*Sourced from pennlive.com*

It's unfortunate that it took a series of major mine accidents this decade to push the federal and state governments to update underground safety regulations.

But the wake-up call was heeded. Pennsylvania's newly created Mine Safety Board meets for the first time Tuesday, and federal regulators continue to hand down new rules following fatal accidents in West Virginia and Kentucky in 2006.

The seven-member Mine Safety Board -- three representatives each from industry and workers, and chaired by the secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection -- was the centrepiece of legislation last summer that

provided the first comprehensive update since 1961 of the state's Bituminous Coal Mine Act.

It was the culmination of efforts that began after nine miners were trapped underground for four days at Quecreek in Somerset County in 2002.

The board was given regulatory authority so it can move more quickly to address new technology and industry developments.

One of the first items on its agenda will be looking to incorporate into state law the latest rules handed down by the U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety Health Administration. They require mine operators to provide hardened "safe rooms" where trapped miners can await rescue, and to install flame-resistant conveyor belts.

Underground coal mining will always be a dangerous job, but those who toil deep beneath Earth's surface should do so with the best safety standards possible.

## Saturday 3 January 2009

### **USA: Three years after Sago, mines told to install shelters**

*Extract from Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

Three years after 11 miners suffocated after a West Virginia coal mine explosion, a federal mine safety agency has ordered deep mines to install the type of shelters that might have kept them alive.

The Jan. 2, 2006, methane explosion in the now-closed Sago Mine near Buckhannon, W.Va., killed one miner in the blast and stranded a dozen others, 11 of whom succumbed to deadly gases. The lone survivor, Randal McCloy Jr., suffered brain damage.

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration issued a regulation Wednesday that requires coal mine operators to install or build refuge chambers that would give miners at least 96 hours of air following accidents.

Pat Silvey, director of standards for MSHA, said the agency still wants miners to escape, when possible.

"In any mine emergency, the first line of defence is for the miner to escape. Only if escape is impossible, then the miners would seek refuge," she said.

Immediately after the Sago explosion, employees in other parts of the mine safely evacuated. The 12-man crew at one of the mining faces tried to escape in an electric mine car but ran into an obstruction they couldn't see in heavy smoke. They tried other routes but again encountered smoke and concluded they were trapped underground.

The miners retreated to an area and tried to set up an airtight barricade to protect them from carbon monoxide and other gases filling the area. Eleven died over 41 hours as rescuers worked to reach them.

Under the regulation, the men would have had the option of retreating to a refuge that, in addition to oxygen for each miner, would have had air-monitoring equipment and a method for expelling gases from the shelter.

Tim Bailey, a Charleston, W.Va., lawyer who represents the family of one of the miners who died, said the Sago investigation revealed that expecting miners to build an airtight barricade in the crucial moments after an explosion or fire is ludicrous.

"It's frankly a 'duh' moment," he said of the revelation.

Most safety rules require equipment to be preassembled, he said.

"Do you want to go out and put the fire hose on the reel after you've got the fire on the fourth floor of your building, or do you want it on the reel before the fire?" Bailey said.

Silvey said MSHA considered and discarded an option that would have required companies to keep materials for a chamber positioned in the mine, so that miners could build the chamber

after an accident. Some in the industry favored that idea, but the agency received many opposing comments from coal operators and miners.

The new regulation gives coal operators until April 30 to submit plans for providing chambers, but some operators haven't waited for the government requirement.

Tom Hoffman, spokesman for Cecil-based Consol Energy, said the company has installed refuge chambers in all but one of its mines and will have the last one installed by Jan. 15.

Consol operates 17 mines in Pennsylvania and five other states and employs about 8,000 people. About 96 percent of its coal comes from underground mines, and about 87 percent of the 64 million tons of coal it mines in a year comes from West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

MSHA estimates that providing the refuges will cost the industry less than 1 percent of the estimated annual revenue for all underground coal mines. For smaller mines, the agency estimates it will cost about \$19,000 a year for mines with fewer than 20 employees and \$73,000 for mines with 20 to 500 employees.

Based on accident data from 1900 to 2006, the agency estimates the shelters could have saved at least 43 of the 264 miners known to have survived an initial accident, but who died because they were trapped underground. Looking forward, the agency estimates the shelters will save one to three lives every two years.

Sunday 4 January 2009

## **Pakistan: Eight miners killed in Mach mine collapse**

*Extract from Daily Times, Lahore, Pakistan*

Around eight miners were feared dead when a coalmine off Mach town in Balochistan collapsed on Sunday.

Rescue workers could only recover one of the eight bodies until the evening. Mine Inspector Muhammad Farooq told APP that at least 11

miners were present in the mine when it collapsed following an explosion.

Authorities immediately initiated rescue efforts and recovered three of the 11 workers alive.

"They were present near the mine's threshold and were recovered safely after the rubble was cleared," Farooq said, adding the other eight workers were engaged in mining coal at a deeper level when the mine collapsed.

They died instantly, Farooq said.

Monday 5 January 2009

### **Qld: Worker killed by mobile crushing plant**

THE Queensland Mines Inspectorate has issued a safety alert after a worker was killed by a mobile crushing plant in Queensland.



*The Inspectorate is urging all mines to review their induction processes*

The man was attempting to remove a hopper door from the mobile plant when a pin became dislodged and caused the door to fall onto him.

The Inspectorate says the incident highlights the importance of developing written instructions for tasks requiring multiple steps, rather than relying on verbal instructions.

The Department of Mines and Energy (DME) says risk management processes must be in place before conducting tasks to ensure an acceptable level of risk is achieved.

The Inspectorate is urging all mines to review their induction processes and ensure maintenance manuals are made readily available to workers.

### **Ukraine: Four mining accident victims in Donetsk in serious condition**

*Extract from KyivPost, Interfax-Ukraine*

Donetsk, - Four of the eight miners injured in a methane explosion at the Dzerzhinsky mine in Donetsk are in a serious condition, according to Emil Fistal, the head of the V.K. Gusak Institute of Emergency and Reconstructive Surgery in Donetsk.

"Surgery is going to be carried out on Monday," he said.

As reported, an air-gas mixture explosion hit the Dzerzhinsky mine, which is owned by the public enterprise Dzerzhinskugol, on Sunday, January 4, at 0450, some 1146 meters below ground. Eight miners were injured and taken to Dzerzhinsk state hospital surgery department.

No miners were killed. All work has now been stopped at the mine, and the cause of the explosion is being investigated.

Wednesday 7 January 2009

### **South African government says mine deaths decreased in 2008**

*Extract from miningweekly.com*

JOHANNESBURG – The number of workers that lost their lives in South Africa's mining industry fell in 2008, the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) confirmed this week.

However, the DME's inspector of mines, Thabo Gazi, would not be drawn on how many fatalities were recorded in 2008, as the department was finalising its statistics, which it would release by the end of January.

Trade union Solidarity in December reported that 168 workers had died in mining accidents in 2008, which was a 23% decline on the 221 workers who died the year before.

Gazi attributed the decline in fatalities to the work of the inspectorate, which he said was

more focused on problem areas during the year.

"We took necessary actions where it was needed, we stopped operations, we issued fines, and generally it heightened people's attention on the need to address health and safety issues," commented Gazi.

Chamber of Mines (CoM) safety and sustainable development adviser Sietse van der Woude said the decline in fatalities could be attributed to a number of actions taken by government, unions and mining companies.

"Companies take health and safety very seriously. All the companies have put very elaborate programmes in place to improve safety, and that certainly contributed very significantly to the improvements," he asserted.

Van der Woude was of the opinion that, while the production cuts and mine shutdowns at the end of 2008 would have contributed to the decline in fatalities to some extent, this would not have played a major role in the 2008 statistics.

He noted that the improvement in the fatality numbers mostly had been achieved in the early part of the year.

Meanwhile, Gazi commented that the new Mine Health and Safety Amendment Bill, which would enforce stricter penalties on mining companies and hold CEOs criminally liable for fatalities at mines, would lead to a further decline in mining fatalities.

"That amendment was purely driven by the very fact that we have legislation that is not enforceable and that provides no incentive for people to do the right thing. I have no doubt that it will really help us to drive the health and safety agenda," he said.

The Bill was passed by Parliament in November last year, but would still have to be signed into law by President Kgalema Motlanthe.

However, Van der Woude said the Bill was not the right approach to follow to improve health and safety in South African mines, noting that the Bill would rather be counterproductive.

He asserted that the approach of the Bill did not get the balance between punitive and preventative measures right.

"We believe that there should be punitive measures, but these should be very well balanced with measures that prevent accidents from happening," he said, adding that the measures would only place blame after an accident or fatality, but would not succeed in preventing accidents and fatalities.

## **USA: Two Injured In Marion County Mine Accidents**

*Sourced from WAJR-AM Radio News, Fairview, Marion County, WV*

Two separate investigations are underway after two different accidents Monday night at the Federal Number Two Mine in Marion County.

Officials with the State Mine Safety Office say a falling rock hit one miner in the head at the Fairview site. That miner was conscious while being taken by helicopter to Ruby Memorial Hospital.

Later, another miner was pinned between a roof bolting machine and the coal rib.

Both miners were said to be doing okay on Tuesday afternoon.

## **USA: Safety violations result in historical financial settlement**

A U.S coal mining company will cough up \$4.2m for safety violations that led to the deaths of two miners in 2006.

Aracoma Coal was found guilty of violating mandatory safety standards and providing false information by the U.S Justice Department in January 2009.

According to the Department, an underground fire trapped 12 miners at the Aracoma mine in

January 2006, suffocating two workers as they searched for an escape route.

The company admitted that ventilation controls had been removed and not replaced nearly six-months prior to the incident.

According to the Justice Department, the settlement marks the largest financial settlement in the coal industry's global history.

### **Vic: 2007 mine collapse caused by 'slack' safety precautions**

A MINE collapse that crippled a Latrobe Valley power station in 2007 was caused by slack and inadequate safety precautions, according to a recent report.



Yallourn power station

An 80-metre high wall of the Yallourn mine collapsed in November 2007, causing the Latrobe River to fill the open-cut mine two billion litres of water. The collapse also forced the Yallourn power station, one of the biggest sources of electricity in Victoria, to shut most of its generators while emergency repairs were done.

In a recent report, investigator, Tim Sullivan, revealed that expert consultants failed to pick up "obvious signs" of the mine's imminent failure.

According to Sullivan, large cracks appeared on the mine's wall and large amounts of water were gushing into the site the day before the incident. Despite this, the consultants concluded that "catastrophic failure was unlikely".

Sullivan also identified a number of other issues that were not made public, which he suggests may have been to 'cut corners'.

Energy Minister, Peter Batchelor, says the Government is auditing all coal mines and improving regional planning to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future.

The Government is also establishing an expert technical review board and an independent body to handle groundwater, and is boosting the expertise of the Department of Primary Industries.

Thursday 8 January 2009

### **Pennsylvania Board meets to improve coal mining safety**

*Extract from Daily American Online, Somerset, PA, USA*

A Harrisburg-sanctioned mine safety board met for the first time Wednesday, nearly seven years after the underground accident that spurred its creation.

The safety board has the authority to create mining regulations without Senate or House approval — an ability that officials say is the board's greatest strength.

"We won't have to wait a month, a year or years," for safe mining regulations to be passed, said Sen. Rich Kasunic, D-Dunbar, who introduced Senate Bill 949 shortly after the Quecreek Mine accident in 2002. During the incident, nine miners who had been trapped underground for more than three days were rescued relatively unharmed.

After the rescue, local legislators, including Kasunic and former state Rep. Bob Bastian, proposed bills to strengthen mine safety. Political debates over the bill stalled its approval for almost a decade. But with the board in place, Kasunic said coal companies will be better regulated with up-to-date safety measures for the evolving industry.

The board's unfettered ability to make regulations shouldn't be taken lightly, according to Hank Parke, spokesman for Frieden's PBS



Coals facility. PBS owns the Quecreek Mine where the 2002 accident occurred.

“Anything they come up with should be well thought out,” Parke said. “Coal mining is already a very heavily regulated industry. And really, a very safe industry.”

Kasunic disagreed, calling it one of the most dangerous professions in the world.

“This will save lives and prevent accidents from happening,” Kasunic said. “We can no longer wait (to create regulations), we must do it as it happens.”

The Board of Coal Mining Safety includes seven people. Three board members are from coal companies, three members are from the United Mine Workers of America and the board is chaired by Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection acting Secretary John Hanger.

One of the board’s first tasks will be to review recent changes to federal law that phase in new fire-resistant conveyor belts and the installation of shelters to protect miners in the event of roof collapses, fires or explosions. The board will have the option of adding requirements to state law and instituting more stringent regulations, according to a prepared statement from the department.

“They will review what the feds have done,” said department spokesman Tom Rathbun. He likened the board to a quasi-governmental entity, similar to one that exists for the state’s waste industry.

The last time changes were made to the mine safety law was 1961. Kasunic said there were still provisions in the law that accounted for the use of mules and open flames — mining practices that have been antiquated for decades.

“Technology is developing so fast,” he said. “To wait for legislation, we would continually be falling behind.”

The board’s next meeting is Jan. 14 in Uniontown.

**The Board of Coal Mine Safety**

- John Hanger, board chairman— Department of Environmental Protection
- Ronald Bowersox, Shelocta — United Mine Workers of America
- John Gallick, Waynesburg — Foundation Coal Corp.
- Dave Hudson, Claysville — Consol Energy
- Robert Penigar, Ford City — Rosebud Mining Co.
- Frank Reidelbacch, Ebensburg — United Mine Workers of America
- James Sabella, Northern Cambria — United Mine Workers of America

**This week in mining accident history**

Some noteworthy accidents	
2 Jan 2006 Sago Mine, USA	The Sago Mine disaster was a coal mine explosion on in the Sago Mine in Sago, West Virginia, USA near the Upshur County seat of Buckhannon. The blast and ensuing aftermath trapped 13 miners for nearly two days, only one of them, Randal McCloy, survived. <b>12 died</b>
9 Jan 1901 Ponisk Pit, Muirkirk, Scotland, UK	A serious accident happened to George Samson, miner, Victoria Buildings, Muirkirk. While on his round as a pony driver, a fall of coal took place and caught him in passing, injuring him in a most serious manner about the face, body and legs. His condition is precarious. [Scotsman 10 Jan 1901] [NB George Samson died on November 20 1909 aged 28]

**1 Dead, 1 Injured in Mexico Mine Collapse**

Extract from *Latin American Herald Tribune, Caracas, Venezuela*

MEXICO CITY -- One engineer died and another was injured in the collapse of part of a zinc mine owned by Grupo Mexico in the

northern part of the country, spokesmen for the company's Minera Mexico unit told Efe.

"Regrettably, on Dec. 31 ... we had an accident where one of our companions lost his life, technical mining engineer Rafael Reina Escalante, a worker with more than 20 years on the job," Minera Mexico safety chief Enrique Valverde told Efe.

Juan Jose Aguilar was injured in the incident and is hospitalized with broken limbs and a "guarded prognosis" in San Luis Potosi, the capital of the same-named state, Valverde said.

The incident occurred in the Las Charcas mine, when several people were working on Level 10 and "rock from the interior of the gallery broke loose, causing the injuries" to the one engineer and killing the 39-year-old Reina Escalante, Valverde said.

The mining company representative ruled out negligence as the cause of the accident, adding that the safety systems were adequate.

The SNTMM miners union, for its part, issued a communiqué in which it attributed the incident to "the terrible industrial safety and hygiene conditions that prevail in the mines of Grupo Mexico."

The worst Mexican mining tragedy in recent times occurred on Feb. 19, 2006, when 65 miners were buried in a massive collapse in the Pasta de Conchos mine in northern Coahuila state, another mine owned by Grupo Mexico.

## US mine deaths fall to 51, the lowest on record

Sourced from WAAY, Huntsville, AL, USA

FRANKFORT, Ky. - The number of miners killed on the job in the United States fell in 2008 to the lowest level on record: 51.

The list includes an Alabama coal miner who died in an accident at the Oak Grove facility in May 2008.

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration reported that 29 of the deaths happened in coal mines, down from 34 in 2007,

and 22 were in copper, gold, stone and other types of mines, down from 33 in 2007.

The 51 deaths are the lowest number since the federal government began keeping records in 1910. The previous low was 55 in 2004.

Federal mine safety chief Richard Stickler told The Associated Press on Thursday that revamped safety laws and beefed up enforcement were among factors that led to the overall decline in mining deaths.

But Stickler said he is by no means pleased, saying "51 fatalities are 51 tragedies, 51 families that will be forever changed. And that is unacceptable and disheartening."

## Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

### P

#### Pelton wheel

A patented water wheel operated by a high pressure jet of water hitting small hemispherical buckets with a central rib and propelling the buckets and the wheel to which they were attached at high speed. Invented in about 1870, Pelton wheels were small and reasonably portable, and were used extensively at mines where a suitable head of water could be provided to drive machinery.

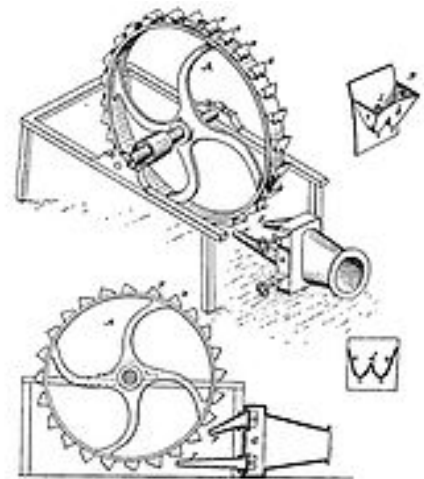


Figure from Pelton's original patent (October 1880)

- Ed.

Happy New Year!