

Miner killed in Harlan, Kentucky

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A US coal miner was killed in a roof fall-in a Harlan County, Kentucky mine Wednesday morning. It is the second such accident in less than a week in the coalfields region and brings to eight the number of coal miners killed in the United States this year.

David Partin was manning the cables on a continuous haulage machine at the Manalapan Mining Co. P-1 mine when he was struck by a section of wall, according to the preliminary report from the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). The rock, seven by three feet and one foot thick, knocked Partin into the dolly of the haulage machine as it backed up, dragging him along.

Other miners on the scene immediately halted the machinery and rushed to locate Partin, who was “semi-conscious, with his eyes open and was moving his arms and legs,” according to the report. “His vital signs weakened on the way to the surface and he was found to be not breathing shortly after arrival on the surface.”

A miner with 16 years’ experience, Partin is remembered by family and co-workers as a loving father, humble, generous and hardworking. “He didn’t have a lazy bone about him—he was a worker,” his cousin told Mountain News channel 57.

The mine remains closed indefinitely. In the month prior to the accident, MSHA cited Manalapan for a dozen violations, the majority of them designated “significant and substantial” (S&S). These violations are considered so hazardous that they pose imminent risk of death to miners and warrant immediate halting of operations.

Citations include failure to provide escape plans, refuge shelters, proper ventilation and other elementary

safeguards. Since the beginning of the year, the P-1 mine has been cited 91 times.

Manalapan operates two other underground mines in Harlan County, both of which have similar records of violations. All have had substantial roof or wall collapses in the past three months. MSHA data indicate the company owes hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties racked up over the past several years.

Manalapan Mining owner Ben Bennett and his brothers and extended family own and operate numerous mines in Harlan County and contribute heavily to state and local election campaigns.

The county has long been among the poorest in the US. More than one in three residents live in poverty, and per capita income is \$15,800. At the same time, the county generates billions of dollars in economic output each year. Harlan mines produced 10,920,000 tons of coal in 2010.

This state of affairs is the product of both the domination of the coal industry over state politics, and the collapse of the United Mine Workers union, which once boasted a membership of tens of thousands in Kentucky. Today not a single mine in the eastern Kentucky coalfield is unionized. With no job security, no recourse to strike, and no employment alternatives, miners feel compelled to work at a frenzied pace under dangerous conditions.

The conditions in the P-1 mine are typical in underground operations throughout the region. Just two days before the Harlan County accident, another miner was killed in a wall collapse in a Raleigh County, West Virginia mine. That operation, owned by Rhino Resource Partners, has been cited by MSHA 128 times

since January 1, including 70 times in the month of June.

Accidents in smaller mines, such as roof and wall collapses, are on the rise as operators strive for higher production rates. Global demand for bituminous and metallurgical coal—both found in abundance in the Appalachian coalfields—has driven a flurry of mergers and acquisitions in the region as well as energy market speculation.



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