

Two US coal miners killed

Clement Daly
22 October 2011

A West Virginia miner was killed at a Consol Energy mine in Marshall County Monday night. Charles McIntire, a 62-year-old coal miner at the Shoemaker Mine on the Ohio River near Moundsville, West Virginia died after being struck by a piece of equipment he was operating.

McIntire dismounted a loading machine he was driving after it failed to coast across a “jump,” the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration stated in its initial report. A jump is an area where a 50-foot break in the trolley wire is left in order for vehicles to cross. When McIntire attempted to use a jumper cable to re-energize the loader, it suddenly moved forward, cutting off his leg.

According to Marshall County Emergency Management Agency Director Tom Hart, the first calls reporting a leg injury were not placed to the Marshall County 911 center. Instead, mine officials made calls directly to STAT Medevac and Tri-State EMS. When the medical helicopter and ambulance arrived, however, they found that additional help was needed, such as local firefighters to set up the landing zone.

It is unclear whether or not a direct call to the 911 center would have provided emergency crews with enough time to save McIntire’s life, but Hart suggested it would have been a more appropriate response. “A direct call to 911 simplifies everything,” he said, “By dialing 911, all those resources are managed from a single point of contact.”

Hart said officials from the EMA will be meeting with Consol to determine if all emergency procedures were followed properly.

McIntire had 30 years experience at the mine. His is the second death at a Consol mine in Marshall County this year. In early February, a bulldozer operator was killed after being pinned between his machine and a water truck at Consol’s McElroy Mine. MSHA later ruled that this death was outside its jurisdiction and not

chargeable to the mining industry.

While the Shoemaker Mine is an underground mine, McIntire was killed above-ground at the mine’s Ohio River portal. The operation is large, employing more than 700 miners who extract millions of tons of coal every year. In 2010, the mine produced more 3.85 million tons; so far this year, production has been significantly higher, with 4.1 million as of the third quarter.

Federal data records at least 15 injuries at the Shoemaker Mine since the beginning of the year, and nearly 500 citations for safety violations, many of them significant and substantial (S&S). This designation is reserved for violations serious enough to warrant the halting of operations because they present the risk of imminent death or injury.

McIntire is the seventh coal miner to be killed in West Virginia this year and the seventeenth nationwide. MSHA has since ruled that two of these deaths are “not chargeable” to the mining industry.

On October 7, a 23-year-old Kentucky mine electrician was killed when a mobile bridge fell and pinned him underneath. Richard D. Coots Jr., employed by Owlco Energy LLC, left behind a wife and two young girls, ages four years and two months.

According to the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing, Coots crawled under a mobile bridge to repair a conveyor chain when the bridge collapsed on him.

The young Evarts resident is the fourth coal mining fatality in that state this year. Family members described him as a “good father, good husband, [and] hard worker” who was “tickled that he was going to be a father again.”

The tragedy of Coots’ death highlights the conditions of life facing many families throughout Appalachia where the hazards of the mining industry are among the

few places to make decent pay.

Coots had five years' experience, having entered the mines at 18 years of age. He was working beside his younger brother, who carried his body out of the mine after the accident. The accident came only one year after another Coots brother, Justin, was killed in a car accident on his way home from working at a coal mine. Justin was only 20 years old at the time.

According to the *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, the Letcher County mine near Partridge, Kentucky, has been operated by Owlco Energy since September 2008. With an average crew of 19 miners, it is typical of the multitude of small and treacherous underground mining operations throughout the region.

Last week West Virginia Office of Miners Health, Safety, and Training (MHS&T) cited Rhino Eastern and Arch Coal for the deaths of two miners early this year based on findings from a state investigation.

Miner Joseph M. Cassell, 33, was killed at Rhino's Eagle No. 1 Mine in Raleigh County after part of an underground mine roof and wall collapsed on him. State inspectors have issued Rhino 16 citations related to improper roof and wall stabilization, as well as inadequate ventilation. Officials also found that Rhino was in violation for not having an emergency medical technician on staff at the time of the accident. (See, "West Virginia coal miner killed")

State inspectors also issued citations in the August 15 death of 46-year-old Charles M. Hall. Hall was also killed in a roof fall as he helped move the longwall machine at the Mountaineer II Mine in Logan County, West Virginia. The mine's operator, Mingo Logan Coal Co. is a subsidiary of energy giant Arch Coal. (See, "Two more US coal miners killed on the job")

State inspectors found Mingo Logan in violation for not properly supporting the roof while the longwall shields were removed. Two personal citations were issued to foremen Kenny Evans and Jeff Golden for not following the roof support plan.

In briefing the mine safety board on the results of their investigation, the state's supervising inspector John Kinder admitted there were some "flaws" in the current emergency response procedures. Mingo Logan called the county's emergency services within 15 minutes of the accident as required by law; however, state mine safety officials weren't notified until more than 40 minutes later.

Kinder explained that since a mine operator is not required to report an accident directly to mine safety officials, news of it often has to first travel through local emergency officials and then to the state Homeland Security Office before it is relayed to them. According to Kinder, the procedure is clearly "not working."

Kinder noted that some coal operators call him directly to report accidents while others call 911 and often don't provide enough information for emergency responders to even know what has occurred. "There are times that we don't get all the information that we need," Kinder said. In accidents that are not instantly fatal, like Charles McIntire's, such a policy of tight-lipped reporting of accidents can be the difference between life and death.



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