

Eight workers killed in Turkish mining disaster

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On January 7, eight coal miners were killed as the result of a methane gas leak in Turkey's Black Sea province of Zonguldak. Rescue teams have managed to recover only five of the bodies from the mine. One miner was found alive under the coal dust.

The miners were trying to reach a coal deposit Monday when they were hit by a sudden discharge of methane gas that caused an explosion, burying the miners in coal dust. According to Burhan Inan, general manager of the state-owned Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise (TTK), which runs the Kozlu district mine, the eight workers were killed by the blast while a number of others were evacuated without injury.

TTK has identified the miners killed as Huseyin Kurekce, Hasan Bozaci, Muharrem Yapici, Yuksel Koca, Ahmet Sekerci, Koksak Kadioglu, Muhsin Akyuz and Satilmis Arslan. Hayrettin Dagkiran has been identified as the only worker found alive at the scene.

Inan claimed that the blast occurred while TTK was in the process of issuing LED chips, which detect the location and depth of miners, to all its 8,800 employees working underground in the catchment area. He also told the media that areas leading out of the mine were being monitored for dangerous gas coming from the coal.

Despite these claims, the most recent accident has exposed the failure of the company to implement recommendations included in a safety report prepared by the Turkish Audit Courts for Turkey's parliament in 2011. Referring to the Kozlu coal mine, the report stated, "It is a coincidence that a fatal incident has not occurred yet."

The report also pointed out that TTK was subcontracting work to a construction firm, instead of a mining company, and that the former failed to meet safety regulations. The study furthermore cited multiple

earlier reports, which exposed negative practices carried out by TTK.

Faruk Celik, a minister in the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, told reporters about an inspection of the mine November 16, 2012. Celik said, "Five issues were discovered during that inspection and the necessary warnings were issued against the facility's management at that time. The facility was fined for the infractions. However, they were all routine procedures."

The mining company was also responsible for a disaster in 2010 that killed 30 miners and incited public outrage. Like the recent accident in Kozlu, the earlier incident took place in Zonguldak province and was caused by a flammable gas setting off an explosion in a mine.

Kozlu was also the scene of the worst mine disaster in Turkish history when in 1992 an explosion in the Incirharmani mine led to the death of 270 miners.

Mine disasters occur with great frequency in Turkey. *Today's Zaman* reported that four workers died when a coal mine collapsed in the central Anatolian city of Eskisehir last April.

In 2011, according to Turkey's Chamber of Mining Engineers, 79 miners died and 117 were injured as a result of mine accidents. The Work Health and Work Safety Assembly reported 81 casualties at Turkish mines in 2012. *Hurriyet Daily News* informed its readers, "A total of 2,554 miners were killed and more than 13,000 lost the ability to work between 1991 and 2008. Turkey has the worst safety record in terms of mining accidents and explosions in Europe and the third worst in the world." *The author also recommends: Miners trapped underground in Turkish coal disaster* [20 May 2010]



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