

# West Virginia mine roof collapse kills one worker, injures two

**Evan Blake**  
10 March 2015

One worker was killed and two others were injured at around 9 p.m. Sunday night in a coal mine roof collapse at the McElroy Mine near Cameron, in Marshall County, West Virginia. Federal authorities have stated that the mine experienced a “rib roll,” which involves a wall collapse underground.

In a press release, the Marshall County Coal Company identified the deceased victim as John Garloch, 45, of Neffs, Ohio, and stated that he was an assistant longwall coordinator. Officials have not yet identified the two other employees, but stated that one was flown to Ruby Memorial Hospital in Morgantown, West Virginia, while the third was taken by ambulance to Wheeling Hospital. One of the two injured workers remains in the hospital, while the other has been released.

Tom Hart, emergency management director for Marshall County, told reporters that emergency crews were called to the mine at around 8:50 p.m. By the time the crews arrived, the three injured workers had already been pulled out by other mine workers.

The Associated Press has reported that just in the week prior to the accident, the McElroy Mine had been cited more than a dozen times, pertaining to “federal law regarding roof plans and protection from roof, face and rib falls,” according to online U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) records.

Since the start of 2015, “MSHA inspectors have issued 189 citations to the mine for alleged violations that included coal dust accumulation, hazardous conditions, noise exposure levels, air quality and other safety issues. The mine received 970 citations in 2014.”

Records show that, so far this year, 14 other injuries have already occurred at the McElroy Mine, while there were 47 injuries at the site in 2014 alone.

The mine is operated by the Marshall County Coal

Company, which is owned by Murray Energy Corporation, the largest privately held coal mining company in the US and the fifth largest coal producer overall in the nation. Murray Energy, along with its subsidiaries, operates more than a dozen active coal mines in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Utah and Illinois.

Robert Murray, the founder, chairman, president and CEO of Murray Energy, is a major donor to the Republican Party and one of the more reactionary figures in American society. In recent years, he has been involved in numerous scandals bound up with his unbridled support for the Republican Party and his bankrolling of self-serving free market policies.

He is an outspoken critic of the scientific outlook on climate change, and through his company-owned Political Action Committee lobbies extensively for anti-carbon emissions reduction legislation. He opposes any form of environmental regulations, and to this day dismisses what he terms “so-called acid rain.”

Murray Energy has a long history of cost-cutting and ignoring safety mandates, which have led to dozens of accidents, most tragically the Utah mine disaster of August 2007, which killed six miners and three emergency responders.

Of a piece with his anti-science demagoguery, at the time Murray insisted that an earthquake had caused the mine collapse, in an effort to cover up his company’s abandonment of any type of safety regulations and its use of dangerous retreat mining techniques.

The federal MSHA, the organization ostensibly responsible for overseeing the safety of mine workers, has seen its budget slashed in recent decades, along with all other regulatory agencies. Further, leadership in the agency has become intimately tied to the coal barons, with George W. Bush’s first appointee to head

MSHA, David Lauriski, formerly the general manager for the Energy West Mining Company in Huntington, Utah.

Sunday's accident takes place as West Virginia's Democratic governor, Earl Ray Tomblin, is considering signing the "Coal Jobs and Safety Act," a bill that intends to roll back what little remains of the state's coal mining safety regulations.

The act would increase the maximum distance between rail tracks and work areas, dismantle an existing joint labor-industry panel that regulates underground diesel equipment to safeguard air quality, and remove a 40-year-old prohibition on transporting equipment in coal mines with workers located deeper in the mine than where the equipment is being moved.

The McElroy mine roof collapse is the first mining fatality in West Virginia and the third in the US so far this year. According to the US Department of Labor, 16 workers were killed nationally in coal mine accidents last year, 5 of them in West Virginia.



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