

Flooded mine in China traps 29 workers

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A mine in the northwest Xinjiang region experienced an underground flood on Saturday evening, affecting 29 workers. Eight workers have been rescued and the remaining 21 are still trapped.

The accident occurred at the Fengyuan Coal mine in Hutubi County as upgrades were being conducted. According to the *Times*, the coal mine's licence was revoked last year due to safety concerns.

The flood occurred around 6:10 p.m. local time Saturday, according to the Xinhua News Agency, with the cause remaining unclear. Power outages ensued as well as the loss of communication lines.

As of Sunday morning, eight workers had been rescued and are in good health while another 12 were located on a platform 1,200 metres below ground level. It was not until Monday morning that the remaining nine miners were found; eight were located on a second platform and another worker was found in an escape route.

All 21 miners remain trapped by the floodwaters, which are currently being pumped out. The Xinhua News Agency reported on Sunday that Ma Xin, director of Changji's emergency management bureau, "said that the underground environment is very complex and drainage is the foremost concern at present," citing the difficulties associated with moving heavy machinery in submerged passages.

Reportedly, three sets of drainage equipment pumping water out at speeds of 450 cubic meters per hour were installed on Sunday. As of Monday morning, seven pumping stations were installed, with some pumping air into the mine as the floodwaters recede.

On Sunday, eight rescue teams comprising 1,484 people from mine rescue, fire, emergency, electricity communications and other departments were assembled at the scene, including 25 ambulances and numbers of medical personnel.

Reporting has been limited since Monday and an

investigation is currently underway into the source of the flooding.

China remains one of the most dangerous countries for mining with explosions and gas leaks a regular occurrence. According to official statistics of the National Mine Safety Administration, there were 434 mining accidents in 2020 with 573 deaths.

While there has been a significant drop in accidents and deaths over recent years, this is attributed less to the adoption of stringent safety measures than to the reduction in demand and the consolidation of the industry using larger, mechanized mines employing fewer workers.

The flooding in Fengyuan Coal mine is the latest in a long line of mining disasters in which hazardous enterprises have been fined and ordered to resolve safety issues but have failed to do so. The widespread and longstanding safety issues are rooted in the drive for profits and production at the expense of workers.

It is also a common occurrence for mines to under-report workplace incidents. In January, an explosion at a gold mine in Shandong was not reported until 30 hours after the fact, which seriously compromised rescue efforts. The blast left 10 dead, one missing and 11 rescued two weeks later.

On March 17, authorities in Hebei province were forced to launch an investigation after finally receiving belated reports of six deaths at an iron ore mine in Wuan in the previous month.

According to *mining.com*, the Wuan city government first heard rumours of the incident on the internet, which reported a death toll of only three miners and compensation offered to the family of at least one.

Xinhua, the state news agency, reported that the six people died after falling down a shaft, which occurred during an inspection of the mine that had halted production in late 2018.

The non-reporting was a crime in an industry with a

poor safety record and lax enforcement of regulations, but in this case it is the government's direct responsibility. The mine, formerly owned by the Tuanchengdong Mining Company, is wholly owned by the Wuan government itself through the Metallurgical Mining Group, according to the data provider Qichacha.

Limited reports announced that individuals associated with the mining enterprise had been placed "under control" and were being investigated in the nearby steel producing centre of Handan.

In a bid to contain public anger, China launched a year-long series of coal mining safety checks last November, focussing on infrastructure, risk prevention management and response and rescue capabilities. The investigation will also purportedly examine safety checks by local government authorities.

China is the world's largest producer of coal accounting for 47 percent of output in 2019, and the world largest consumer taking 53 percent of the global total. The Chinese coal industry was valued at around \$345 billion in 2018.



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