

7 Dead, 19 Missing In Mine Explosion

BY LAWRENCE MESSINA
Associated Press Writer

MONTCOAL, W.Va. — Dozens of rescuers were trying to find 19 missing miners after an explosion killed seven workers Monday at an underground coal mine with a history of releasing vast amounts of highly combustible methane gas, the mine owner and mine safety officials said.

Nine rescue crews usually made up of six members each were at the southern West Virginia mine that covers several square miles, said federal Mine Safety and Health Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere.

State mining director Ron Wooten said the blast happened around 3 p.m. at Massey Energy Co.'s Upper Big Branch mine in Raleigh County, about 30 miles south of Charleston. The company did not provide details on the extent of the damage or if other miners had made it out on their own at the mine that has had three other fatalities in the last dozen years.

"We want to assure the families of all the miners we are tak-

ing every action possible to locate and rescue those still missing," said Massey CEO Don Blankenship, who confirmed the number of dead and missing in a statement.

He said the names would not be released until next-of-kin were notified.

One injured miner was in intensive care at Charleston Area Medical Center, spokeswoman Elizabeth Pellegrin said. "We are preparing for other patients," she said.

No one has said what might have caused the explosion, but federal records say the Eagle coal seam releases up to 2 million cubic feet of methane gas into the mine every 24 hours. That is a large amount, said Dennis O'Dell, health and safety director for the United Mine Workers labor union.

Methane is one of the great dangers of coal mining. The colorless, odorless gas is often sold to American consumers to heat homes and cook meals. In mines, giant fans are used to keep methane concentrations below certain levels. In 2006, 12 miners died in a methane explo-

sion at the Sago Mine in West Virginia. If concentrations are kept between 5 percent and 15 percent, the gas can explode with a spark roughly similar to the static charge created by walking across a carpet in winter.

The sprawling Upper Big Branch, which cannot be seen from the road, has 19 openings and roughly 7-foot ceilings. Inside, it's criss-crossed with railroad tracks used for hauling people and equipment. It is located in one of the state's more heavily mined areas. Along the main two-lane road lined with emergency vehicles Monday night are several plants where coal is prepared for shipment by train.

The bulk of the coal is removed with machine called a longwall miner that uses a cutting head to move back and forth across the working face somewhat like a 1,000-foot-long deli slicer. Hydraulic roof supports shield the miners and equipment as the machines cut deeper into the mountain, with the roof in the mined-out areas caving in by design after work-

ers move on, according to Massey's Web site.

The mine, run by Massey subsidiary Performance Coal Co., also has caches of extra oxygen along emergency escape routes and airtight chambers designed to provide enough air to keep people alive for four days, according to Randy Harris, an engineering consultant who oversees installation of high-tech gear.

The mine produced 1.2 million tons of coal in 2009, according to the mine safety agency, and has about 200 employees, most of whom work underground. They would not have all been working the same shift. The mine has two production shifts and one maintenance shift and extracts coal from the 72-inch Eagle coalbed, a thick seam for the region in 2010.

Firefighters in nearby Whitesville asked the town's First Baptist Church to keep its doors open in case family members of miners come looking for information, Pastor Brian Kelly said. No family members had arrived by early Monday evening.

OBITUARIES

Clifford Hurlbert

NORFOLK, Neb. — Memorial services for Clifford Warren Hurlbert, 52 of Norfolk will be held 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 6, 2010 at the First United Methodist Church. Reverend Dr. Charles Kathurima M. will officiate. He died Thursday, April 1, 2010 at his home in Norfolk.



Hurlbert

Clifford was born October 26, 1957 to Jesse and Eva (Dotson) Hurlbert in Norfolk, NE. He attended school in Pender, NE. He lived in the Pender area until the late 1970's when he moved to Yankton, SD where he lived until the late 1980's. He moved to Norfolk and became a partner with Brian Gibbs at the Quick Change Lube Center. He was then employed by Volkman Plumbing and Heating in Norfolk for 18 years.

He married Rebecca Westerman in Las Vegas, NV on January 2, 2006.

He is survived by his wife Rebecca, 4 sons: Matt Hurlbert of Sioux City, IA., Brandon and Seth Higginbotham of Norfolk and Lucas Hurlbert of Norfolk and

grandson Seth Hurlbert of Sioux City, IA. Also survived by his brother Mike Hurlbert of Ewing, and sister Marin Hendron, her husband Jon, and nephews Justin Hurlbert his wife Janina of Las Vegas, NV, and his nephew Jesse Rutar and his wife Nicole of Thurston, NE. Also survived by his brother and sister-in-law's Mike Westerman, Cliff Westerman, Ron Westerman his wife Shelley, Steve Kellogg his wife Loretta, Shelly Maresch and her husband Al which are all from Nebraska, and Patricia Reynolds, Ken Westerman and his wife Kathy, Rick Mills and his wife Roberta all of Florida. He is also survived by his nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents Jesse and Eva Hurlbert; Mother and Father-in-law Paul and Virginia (Johnson) Westerman, a sister-in-law Phyllis Westerman Hanover and niece Sheena Westerman.

Hower-Fillmer Mortuary is in charge of arrangements.
Yankton Press & Dakotan
April 6, 2010

Gilbert Hagenbuch

VERMILLION — Gilbert A. "Gil" Hagenbuch, 82, of Vermillion, SD died Saturday,

March 3 at the VA Medical Center in Sioux Falls, SD.

Gil was born May 15, 1927 in Mitchell, SD to Carl and Nellie (Parnell) Hagenbuch joining an older sister Janet, and later by a brother Roger. He graduated from Hurley High School in 1945, and joined the Army in 1948. He served in the Korean War and was honorably discharged in 1951, receiving the combat infantry badge and a purple heart.

He was united in marriage on November 9, 1952 to Natalie Jensen, and he farmed in the Davis area for many years and also worked at Fountains International in Beresford, SD.

After retiring from farming, Gil kept busy helping his neighbor modify tractors for use by people with limited mobility.

Gil had been a resident of the Good Samaritan Care Center in Centerville, SD for the past three years.

Survivors include a sister Janet of Sioux Falls, SD, a sister-in-law Paula (Glen) Evtitt of Sedro-Wooley, WA, a son Paul (Jeanne) Hagenbuch and son Thomas all of Vermillion, and many nephews and friends.

Funeral services will be 2:30 PM Thursday, April 8 at the Trinity Lutheran Church in

Vermillion, with visitation one hour prior at the church. Family burial will take place on Friday morning. For online condolences and obituary please visit hansen-funeralhome.com.
Yankton Press & Dakotan
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Raymond Hoxeng

DENVER — Raymond B. Hoxeng, 90, of Denver died Thursday (April 1, 2010.)

Memorial service at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 24, at Faith United Lutheran Church, rural Volin, with burial to follow at Zion Cemetery.

Virginia Hummel

ELK POINT — Virginia A. Hummel, 73, of Elk Point died Sunday (April 4, 2010) at Sanford Vermillion Hospital.

Funeral arrangements are pending with Anderson-Sieck-Kober Funeral Home, Elk Point.

Elvin Cacek

ELK POINT — Elvin A. Cacek, 83, of Elk Point died Monday (April 5, 2010) at VA Medical Center, Sioux Falls.

Funeral arrangements are pending with Anderson-Sieck-Kober Funeral Home, Elk Point.

VOTE

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for the last 18 months, economic cycles eventually produce a recovery. The city and its allies have been involved in supporting RTEC and educational programs for workforce development, which in a changing economy is necessary. The designation of a tract of ground in Fox Run as a Technology Park, plus our participation in the 1-29 Corridor Technology Task Force, is another forward-thinking step. With the Meridian Bridge work and the riverfront development, we should be able to tie some downtown re-development into our economic growth plans.

3. The budget for the city has been strained by the economic slump. Do you have any

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ideas for cost cuts or savings? Are there areas where the city needs re-prioritize and spend more money?

The City Commission annually reviews the budget, including the Capital Improvements Program, which gives the Commission and City Staff an opportunity to prioritize those projects from the past that may have increased or decreased in importance. In addition, the commission is always looking at new requests for service improvements or upgrades. It seems that we are always trying to find money for an industrial road extension or the extension of services, such as the sewer line extension along Highway 50

I wish to thank all my relatives and friends for my 95th Birthday. For all the cards, gifts, flowers, balloons, and flowers from my friends at the VFW.
Josephine Braunesreither

to the east. State and federal dollars are an important part of the economic development of Yankton, and city staff has been very good at finding assistance as needed.

4. Renovation work is set to get under way this spring on converting the Meridian Bridge into a recreational trail. The city has done a lot of planning for the downtown area to prepare for this eventuality. Once the renovation is complete this fall, what steps do you think the city needs to take to capitalize on this unique project?

Before the state is finished renovating the Meridian Bridge, the city needs to finish the plan-

ning that it started several years ago, regarding tying the downtown to the riverfront. We will need to decide how best to do that. We have a general plan that was designed by consultants several years ago, and it is now time to finish the planning that was started by a previous Commission. I would envision some public improvements and some private improvements as we proceed. This is truly an exciting opportunity.

5. Any closing thoughts?

I would like to remind everyone to vote on April 13, and thank you for your past support.

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Lawmakers: Karzai Threatened To Join Taliban

KABUL (AP) — Afghan President Hamid Karzai threatened over the weekend to quit the political process and join the Taliban if he continued to come under outside pressure to reform, several members of parliament said Monday.

Karzai made the unusual statement at a closed-door meeting Saturday with selected lawmakers — just days after kicking up a diplomatic controversy with remarks alleging foreigners were behind fraud in last year's disputed elections.

Lawmakers dismissed the latest comment as hyperbole, but it will add to the impression the president — who relies on tens of thousands of U.S. and NATO forces to fight the insurgency and prop up his government — is growing increasingly erratic and unable to exert authority without attacking his foreign backers.

"He said that 'if I come under foreign pressure, I might join the Taliban,'" said Feroz Marenai, who represents the eastern province of Nangarhar.

"He said rebelling would change to resistance," Marenai said — apparently suggesting that the militant movement would then be redefined as one of resistance against a foreign occupation rather than a rebellion against an elected government.

Record \$16M Fine Levelled Against Toyota

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government is seeking to fine Toyota a record \$16.4 million, accusing the Japanese auto giant of hiding a "dangerous defect" in its slow reporting of faulty gas pedals that have been blamed for unintended sudden accelerations and motorists' deaths.

The proposed fine, announced Monday by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, is the most the government could levy for the sticking gas pedals that have led Toyota to recall millions of vehicles. There could be further penalties under continuing federal investigations, and Toyota also faces private lawsuits seeking many millions more.

Documents obtained from the Japanese automaker show that Toyota knew of the problem with the sticking gas pedals in late September but did not issue a recall until late January, LaHood said. The sticking pedals involved 2.3 million vehicles.

"We now have proof that Toyota failed to live up to its legal obligations," LaHood said in a statement. "Worse yet, they knowingly hid a dangerous defect for months from U.S. officials and did not take action to protect millions of drivers and their families."

Charged Catholic Priest Still Working In India

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Top officials at the Vatican were warned more than four years ago about a Catholic priest later charged with sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl in Minnesota, according to newly released Vatican correspondence, but to this day he continues to work in his home diocese in India.

Prosecutors in Minnesota said Monday they are trying to extradite the Rev. Joseph Palanivel Jayapaul. Jayapaul denied the abuse allegations and said he has no plans to return to the United States to face the courts.

The Vatican said Monday it has cooperated with U.S. law enforcement officials working to extradite Jayapaul. In a statement to The Associated Press, Vatican attorney Jeffrey Lena said the Holy See handed over the priest's address in India. He said the Vatican had recommended Jayapaul be defrocked, because it believed the charges were serious enough, but that his local bishop in India refused.

The bishop, the Most Rev. A. Almaraz of the diocese of Ottumwanda, said he had disciplined Jayapaul by sending him to a monastery for prayer.

Jayapaul was charged in Minnesota in 2007, more than a year after he returned to India. Officials in the Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota, had told him to stay there after allegations against him first surfaced.

Man Threatened Force To Stop Abortion

DALLAS (AP) — Federal officials say a Texas man faces charges after he filed documents in federal court threatening to use deadly force to stop an abortion.

Elyndon Joseph "Joey" Lo of Plano was in federal court Monday. The 27-year-old filed the documents Friday saying his religious beliefs, including that abortion is murder, entitled him to use deadly force to prevent it from happening.

He said he'd do so if the U.S. Supreme Court didn't immediately act to outlaw abortions.

Lo threatened to show up at a specific clinic Friday, though officials say it's not clear he ever did. He was arrested Saturday and is being held pending an April 15 detention hearing.

Lo doesn't have a listed phone number and is acting as his own attorney.

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Thank You

We wish to thank the staff of the hospital emergency room for care to Helen. Also to Dr. Johnson, Dr. Neilsen and Jim Fresk for the surgery and care after the surgery. We want to thank the staff and nurse of Yankton Care Center and therapy given to me for the stay there. We also want to thank everyone for the cards and phone calls, and food and gifts. Also the therapists for the help to recuperate and work at the care home. Thanks to Mgrs. Herman and Bob Cappel for their prayers. Thanks everyone & I am sorry if I missed anyone.

Helen Zdenek

Welcome Brenda!

America's Best Realty welcomes Brenda Warfel to the team!

Brenda brings a strong realtor background with her. She is excited to be with us and is looking forward to serving your real estate needs!

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