

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Toyota Exec Before Recall: '...Come Clean'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Five days before Toyota announced a massive recall, a U.S. executive at the company wrote in an internal e-mail: "We need to come clean" about accelerator problems, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

"We are not protecting our customers by keeping this quiet," wrote Irv Miller, group vice president for environment and public affairs. "The time to hide on this one is over."

The recently retired Miller wrote the Jan. 16, 2010, e-mail as Toyota officials were on their way to Washington to discuss the problems with federal regulators. On Jan. 21, Toyota announced it would recall 2.3 million vehicles to address sticking pedals in six vehicle models.

The e-mail was addressed to Katsuhiko Koganei, executive coordinator for corporate communications for Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. Inc.

Man On Flight Possibly Sneaking Smoke

WASHINGTON (AP) — A law enforcement official says an incident aboard a Washington to Denver flight Wednesday night appears to have been a misunderstanding after the man was confronted trying to sneak a smoke in the bathroom.

The official says the man "made a joke about it" — which only alarmed people further.

No explosives were found on the man and officials do not believe he was trying to harm anyone.

The official was not authorized to discuss details of the case and therefore spoke on condition of anonymity.

Man Arrested For Alleged Health Care Threat

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The FBI says the suspect accused of making threatening phone calls to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is a 48-year-old San Francisco man.

FBI spokesman Joseph Schadler identified the man as Gregory Lee Giusti. He was arrested at his home shortly after noon Wednesday.

Schadler did not disclose the charges against Giusti, but said he's due in court Thursday.

Law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that the suspect made dozens of calls to Pelosi's homes in California and Washington, as well as to her husband's business office. They say he recited her home address and said if she wanted to see it again, she would not support the health care overhaul bill that since has been enacted.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the case publicly.

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W. VA MINE EXPLOSION

Lethal Gas Keeps Rescuers Outside

BY LAWRENCE MESSINA AND GREG BLUESTEIN
Associated Press Writers

MONTCOAL, W.Va. — Two full days after the worst U.S. mining disaster in a generation, dangerous gases underground prevented rescuers late Wednesday from venturing into the Upper Big Branch coal mine to search for any survivors of the explosion that killed at least 25 workers.

Crews drilled holes deep into the ground to release the gases. By evening, a federal safety official said the levels of lethal carbon monoxide and highly explosive hydrogen and methane measured at the top of the holes were steadily dropping. Officials by late evening planned to test levels at the bottom of the holes to determine if three teams of five rescuers each can enter.

"We just can't take any chances" with the lives of rescuers, Kevin Stricklin of the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration had said earlier. "If we're going to send a rescue team, we have to say it's safe for them to go in there."

Officials could not say specifically when rescuers might be able to go in, but if the readings at the bottom were good, they want them on

the move as soon as possible, Stricklin said. Stricklin said relatives of the miners backed the decision to hold off for now.

"We've asked the families to be patient," he said earlier in the day.

Gov. Joe Manchin and others saw only a "sliver of hope" that the miners survived by reaching one of the shaft's rescue chambers, which are stocked with food, water and enough oxygen to last four days. Workers planned to drill another hole so they could lower a camera into one of the airtight chambers to see if anyone managed to get inside.

"We've been working against long odds from day one," Manchin warned.

The federal mine agency appointed a team of investigators to look into the blast, which officials said may have been caused by a buildup of methane.

The mine's owner, Massey Energy Co., has been repeatedly cited for problems with the system that vents methane and for allowing combustible dust to build up. On the day of the blast, MSHA cited the mine with two safety violations — one involving inadequate maps of escape routes, the other concerning an improper splice of electrical cable. However, Stricklin said the violations had nothing to do with the blast.

Massey CEO Don Blankenship has strongly defended the company's record and disputed accusations from miners that he puts coal profits ahead of safety.

As of late Wednesday, there had been no signs of life deep underground since the explosion. During the drilling of the ventilation holes, rescuers banged on a pipe for about 15 minutes but got no response. Miners are trained to bang on drilling equipment and ceiling bolts if trapped.

Family members could do little but wait. Alice Peters said she was told her 47-year-old son-in-law, Dean Jones, was among the missing, though Massey said it does not know which four miners might be alive.

Peters said Jones' wife, Gina, has been at the mine site since the explosion and would not leave. "She's not doing too good," Peters said. "They told them to go home because they weren't going to let the mine rescuers back in. They're still drilling."

Seven bodies were pulled out after the explosion, and two miners were hospitalized. Manchin said Wednesday that one was doing well and the other was in intensive care. Eighteen bodies remained in the mine, but emergency workers were able to identify only four before methane forced them out Monday.

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Obama Heads To Prague To Sign Arms Deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama is taking the first major step in his push toward a nuclear-free world, returning to Prague to sign the kind of arms-reduction treaty with Russia unseen for nearly two decades.

The deal goes beyond modest arsenal reductions, offering Obama a chance to repair soured relations with Moscow and pursue more dramatic cuts in global nuclear weapon stockpiles.

The new treaty, to be signed Thursday by Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, will shrink both nations' arsenals of strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 over seven years, about a third less than the 2,200 currently permitted. It was a year ago nearly to the day, also in Prague, that Obama outlined his agenda to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. security strategy, with a long-range goal of eliminating nuclear arms.

The agreement — "new START," as it is known — is clear evidence of an improved U.S.-Russian relationship that had fallen to such a low in recent years that some worried about a second Cold War, with disputes over U.S. missile defense plans, Moscow's 2008 invasion of Georgia and NATO expansion to Russia's doorstep. Under Obama, Russian cooperation on key priorities, from helping to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran to opening supply routes for the U.S. military into Afghanistan and agreeing to new arms reductions, has increased — though not by a huge amount.

Because of arcane warhead-counting rules involving delivery vehicles, the real reductions under the agreement could be far less than the advertised numbers. Regardless, the allowed stockpiles still leave plenty for global annihilation. There is also some opposition in both countries to the required legislative ratification.

And, proof of continuing bilateral distrust, the process of achieving it was far more difficult than the Obama administration expected when the negotiations were inaugurated last April by Obama and Medvedev. Instead of an easy lift to be completed by December, when its predecessor, the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, expired, intense wrangling extended the talks by more than three months. Complications arose from Russian testing of Obama, disagreements over a new verification regime and other factors.

So, going forward, further Russian concessions to the U.S. are far from guaranteed. But the hard-fought treaty is at least a foundation.

"A long journey begins with a first step. And if he didn't have this first step, then pretty much both of those agendas (the U.S.-Russian relationship and further arms cuts) would be severely hampered," said Andrew Kuchins, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Out On The Town

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Under the direction of Dr. Sean Vogt & Dean Rettedal

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To join, contact Chris Tudor at 668-1292, ctudor@mtmc.edu; or Vi Ranney at 665-3596. Please RSVP by April 12th.

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