

MAKE REPORT ON EXPLOSION

Mine Inspector Says Responsibility for Blast Lies With Superintendent

"We found no evidence of any unusual condition to be dealt with and feel safe in saying that the responsibility for the explosion rests with the foreman for neglecting to keep the switches in safe working condition," says State Mine Inspector W. W. Bardon of Gallup in a report to Governor Dixon on the Lamb mine blast at Madrid December 6.

Tom Burke, the mine foreman, was one of the five men who lost their lives.

Saying that the fire boss made an examination on the morning of December 6 and found small quantities of gas, which did not constitute a dangerous condition, Bardon adds:

WANT TO CHANGE

"On the morning of the explosion the mine foreman wanted to change the location of the power line at the fifth left overcast and in order to do this it was necessary to cut the line and replace it after morning 11. Before cutting the line he sent a man into the face of the sixth left entry where the explosion occurred, to stop the blowers and to tell the men to keep back from the face until the blowers were started up again. After the line had been spliced the foreman went into the sixth left to start the blowers and found that in splicing the line the direction of rotation on the blowers had been reversed. He came back to the slope for the electrician and the two of them went back to the blowers."

McChure, one of the men working in the back entry and who was on the entry about 300 feet from the blowers, saw the two men jump, heard the blowers start, stop, start again. Then came the explosion. The blower had been stopped before the explosion; the switches were open.

INSPECTOR'S COMMENT

The inspector comments: "We were at a loss to account for the fact that both switches show the blowers were not running when the explosion happened, but after talking with Chief Bardon, a man who had operated these blowers under similar conditions, we were able to understand what may have happened in this instance.

"It had been the practice in starting these blowers to first test for gas around the blower and if gas was found the operator would brush the gas away with his coat or piece of brattice cloth, then start the blower. In the meantime he would hold his safety lamp between the blower and the face of the entry to warn him if the air was carrying the gas back to the blower. If the lamp showed gas approaching the blower, the blower was stopped immediately and the act of brushing was repeated.

WORKING BLOWERS

"It appears that the foreman was following this method in starting the blowers which accounts for his starting and stopping the blower, as reported by McChure. Also his

(Continued on Page Six)

1930 Lamb mine explosion



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**MAKE REPORT
ON EXPLOSION**
(Continued From Page One)

safety lamp showed the wick had been turned down to a lighting flame. Since a test of the switch proved that it flashed only when being thrown off, had he left the blowers running there would have been no explosion.

The switches were of the oil submerged type—a safe equipment when kept in perfect condition. Testing the switches, he says, proved that either could have ignited the gas. The primary blower switch had been torn from its fastenings and some of the oil had run out of it. Filling the reservoir with oil, Risdon says, it formed an arc the first time it was opened but thereafter functioned perfectly.

RESERVOIR DRY
The oil reservoir of the secondary blower switch was empty and it formed an arc both when it was opened and when it was closed. However, Risdon says it is doubtful if any attempt was made to start the secondary blower.

Rock dust barriers, he says, probably kept the explosion from spreading throughout the mine.

Saying the mine foreman was considered a competent and reliable man, Risdon adds:

"It may be well to point out the mistakes he made, not for the purpose of censuring him, but with the hope of preventing a like occurrence at some future time."

"First. The blower should never be set so close to a cross-cut that it is possible for the return air to carry gas near the blower, but should be set well back, on the intake air where a current of fresh air is traveling past the blower and its volume at least three times in quantity of that circulated by the blower; an extra length of tubing (50 feet) in this case would have prevented an explosion.

FAILED TO EXAMINE
"Second. Neglect to examine condition of switches to know they were in condition to function properly.

"To operate one of these switches without points of contact being submerged in oil is quite as dangerous as it would be to take a safety lamp, with a hole in the glass, into an explosive mixture of gas. The oil is the safety feature of the switch just as gas is the safety feature of the lamp.

"Third. He should have seen to it personally that all the men were out of this entry and that a safe place and that none of them returned until after the entry had been cleared of gas.

"Under no circumstances should any men be permitted in a gaseous mine during any interruption of the ventilating current, except those men working on ventilation.

MATCHES IN POCKET
"Fourth. Minimizing a hazard. The old saying that familiarity breeds contempt is to a certain extent true with men who have spent a life time under ground. Men who have had experience in very gaseous mines are prone to consider mines making only a small quantity of gas as not being dangerous. It is common gossip among the men that the foreman did not consider that there was any danger from gas in the Lamb mine.

"Pockets have proven the error of his judgment.

A handful of matches and a package of cigars were found in the clothes of the dead electrician, Victor Lense, and Risdon says "this furnishes another possible cause of ignition but hardly a probable one."

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