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Phoenix youth dies in 150-foot fall into uncovered mine; owner sought

State's fine for failing to protect abandoned shaft less than \$1,000

By GENE VARN
Southern Arizona Bureau

A 15-year-old Phoenix boy died Sunday after falling down an abandoned mine shaft near Gleason while rock hunting, the Cochise County Sheriff's Office reported Tuesday.

Dave Severance, father of Neal Severance, complained Tuesday that his son's death might have been averted if the mine shaft had been covered or otherwise protected. His son was a pupil at Washington High School.

James Matt, chief deputy state mine inspector, said that state law requires abandoned mine shafts to be covered, fenced or otherwise protected and that warning signs be

posted.

Sgt. Don Kyte, public-information officer of the Cochise County Sheriff's Office, said Tuesday that Neal Severance died of a skull fracture after falling about 150 feet.

Kyte said the boy was rock hunting with his uncle and a younger brother when he fell into the mine about 2:45 p.m. Sunday.

About 20 members of the sheriff's search-and-rescue team along

with a Department of Public Safety helicopter were dispatched to the scene, Kyte said. The boy was lifted out of the shaft about 5:15 p.m. and pronounced dead about 6 p.m., Kyte said.

The sheriff's sergeant said an investigation was being conducted to determine who owned the abandoned mine.

Matt said that although there are regular reports of people and vehi-

cles falling down abandoned shafts in the state, the youth's death apparently was the first fatality from a fall in the last five years.

The chief deputy mine inspector said that failure to protect abandoned mine shafts is a petty offense punishable by a fine of less than \$1,000.

"If anyone complains to us (about unprotected shafts), we will work on finding the owner and get

them covered," he said.

There apparently had been no complaints about the mine shaft down which the Severance boy fell, Matt said.

He estimated that 90 percent of the owners of mine shafts about which there have been complaints agree to protect them when contacted by the mine inspector's office.

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