

THE HORROR OF FRANKLIN

Local Agent of the O. I. Co. Talks of the Disaster.

Mr. N. Poston, agent in this city for the Oregon Improvement Company, owner of the Franklin coal mine, at which the disaster occurred Friday, was seen yesterday by an Oregonian reporter and asked to explain the causes leading to such serious conflagrations. He said that lignite coal, such as mined at Franklin, is liable at any time to spontaneous combustion. Other coal is not so much in danger of this. He says that it is a very common thing for fire to break out in the Franklin mine, but the miners so thoroughly understand the condition of affairs that they are not often injured.

In the Franklin mine, as in others, the main tunnel runs down into the earth at an angle of 45 degrees. Beginning at a short distance from the entrance, gangways, or small tunnels, are run at intervals of 200 feet from the main tunnel. Then what are known as "breasts," or tunnels, are dug upwards from these. There may be a dozen or more breasts in each gangway, and here is where the miners get the coal.

"From what I can learn," said Mr. Poston, "I judge that the ill-fated miners were working in these breasts, and as it is not unusual for fires to break out in any one of them, were not much alarmed when the signal was given. Those that did leave their work and made for the main tunnel probably escaped, but the poor fellows that remained to fight the fire were evidently driven back and suffocated before they could get to fresh air.

"When a fire breaks out in one of the breasts and cannot be subdued, that entire gangway is closed up and left to smother out. Very often it is never worked again. It means a big loss to the company operating the mine, but these are considerations that are anticipated. This is the first accident where many lives have been lost that the Franklin mine has ever suffered. It was considered one of the safest mines in the country.

"Of course, there is always more or less danger in operating a lignite coal mine. There is little danger of explosion from gas. Spontaneous combustions are constantly expected, but almost always successfully guarded against the loss of life. Lignite coal is so combustible that it very often takes fire when lying in great heaps in the bunkers or on the docks. In Seattle we have lost a great deal of coal by such combustion."

Mr. Poston says that the Franklin mine has had an average output of 9000 tons per month. He has advices from headquarters that operations will be resumed in a short time, but the output will be decreased for some time about one-third. This will work a hardship on the company, as it has orders for the full capacity of the Franklin mine and its mine at Newcastle.