

M/NM FATAL

1936 0001

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF MINES
BY C. W. OWINGS

SUBJECT: Asphyxiation of six men, Mountain City mine, Mountain City Copper Co., Mountain City, Nevada, August 13, 1936.

On Thursday, August 13, 1936, between 3:15 and 4:15 p.m., six men lost their lives by asphyxiation at the vertical winze 100 feet in depth connecting the 500 and 600 foot levels of the Mountain City mine of the Mountain City Copper Company.

The 600 foot level is connected to the 500 foot level by a winze, which had not been ventilated for several months prior to the accident on August 13. A bucket was suspended at the collar of the winze which had a hinged door, used for closing the hoisting compartment, leaning at an angle of about 45 degrees against the hanging wall. A deep well pump with a starting switch placed in fresh air at the collar of the 514 foot winze had been provided so no one would have to go down into the winze during the intermittent pumping operations. An incandescent 110 volt light was located at the foot of the winze so the pumper by looking down could determine the height of the water. On August 13, the pumper in company with two other men left the pump on the 500 foot level and probably went down the winze out of curiosity. The pumper started to lower the two men in the bucket and they were overcome probably rather quickly and fell out of the bucket to the bottom of the winze. The pumper then probably started down the manway to rescue the unconscious fellows and fell probably about 50 feet down the manway. The pumper usually telephoned the top man when he started to pump and when the usual call was not received the cager investigated, then called to the top man that the men were lying at the bottom of the winze. Without waiting for the top man to arrive the cager started down the winze, lost consciousness and fell to within five feet of the bottom. A rescue crew of six men went to the winze and two men were lowered about 35 feet, lighting matches as they went, and discovered the body of one of the men. About this time both men were overcome and the leg of one men got caught *of the* so that the bucket could not be raised. A rope was put around the waist of one of the rescuers in order to loosen this man's leg out each time the rescuers were overcome. Finally the leg was freed by using a pipe and the two men were hoisted to the 500 level. The two men wearing oxygen breathing apparatus finally recovered the other four bodies.

During recovery operations request was made of the Tintic Standard Mining Company in Utah for oxygen breathing apparatus and men to wear them and four men were sent by airplane; the other two were flown to Elko nearby in a transport plane.

These men disobeyed instructions in going into this winze and as they were wearing electric cap lamps, their foolish acts not only cost six lives but also gave the electric cap lamp a "black eye" it doesn't deserve. As a result the Nevada Legislature probably will enact a law requiring a candle or a carbide lamp to be used along with the electric cap lamp whenever the electric cap lamp is used in Nevada mines. The requirement of use of a candle to test air entering poorly ventilated places is good policy but the carbide lamp is dangerous and on September 2, 1936, two men wearing carbide lamps were asphyxiated on entering a coal mine near Wheeler, Pennsylvania, the atmosphere of which was depleted of oxygen, just as was the atmosphere in the winze at Mountain City. (See Memorandum 1359 for details of the episode at Wheeler, Pa.)