Explosion Report File

BUREAU OF MINES

AUG 14 1952

Mount Hope, W. Va.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF MINES
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

I. M. 4202
July 8, 1952

TO MEMBERS OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY DIVISION:

SUBJECT: Gas explosion, Harman Branch Air Shaft--Olga No. 2 mine, Caretta, West Virginia

A gas explosion occurred about 5:30 p.m., Thursday, June 26, 1952, in the Harman Branch partially completed new air shaft of the Olga No. 2 mine, Olga Coal Company, Caretta, McDowell County, West Virginia. Four of the five men working in the shaft at the time of the explosion died from burns, inhalation of poisonous gases, and exposure. The fifth man was burned seriously.

The explosion occurred in a partially completed air shaft which was being sunk to serve the Olga No. 2 mine. Only five men were in the shaft at the time of the explosion. The normal inside shaft-construction crew consisted of seven men, but two of the crew were on the surface. The rescue work, led by company officials and employees, was completed within 10 minutes after the explosion.

The Harman Branch air-shaft sinking operations were started in June 1951 and had reached a depth of 529 feet when the explosion occurred. The coal bed that is to be intersected lies at a depth of 810 feet at the location of the shaft. The shaft is circular and has a diameter of 20.5 feet. Prior to the construction of the Harman Branch air shaft, a pilot hole 6 inches in diameter was drilled for drainage from the surface. Since the blowing system of ventilation is used in the Olga No. 2 mine, this pilot hole when it was open served as a return airway to the surface and was an aid to ventilation and blasting in the shaft. The return air in No. 6 heading 4 north that entered the pilot hole contained approximately 0.70 to 0.76 percent methane. However, when the rock in the shaft was blasted, the pilot hole became filled with loose rock.

Ventilation in the Harman Branch air shaft was accomplished by means of a high-pressure blower fan of 4,600-cubic-feet-of-air-a-minute capacity. The fan was equipped with a 12-inch fabric tubing, but, at the time of the explosion, the fan was not operating. The fan had been shut down for about an hour previous to the explosion.

Tests for gas were made occasionally with a permissible flame safety lamp in the air shaft and gas was detected at the bottom of the air shaft at the pilot hole; however, tests for gas were not made on June 26 prior to the explosion and there was no flame safety lamp in the shaft at the time of the explosion.

The five men who were engaged in removing a platform to make preparation for mucking were 27 feet from the bottom of the shaft. When the platform was removed, three men entered the bucket to be lowered to the bottom of the shaft. While the bucket was suspended about 27 feet above the shaft bottom, two men remained on the small platform which was also about 27 feet above the bottom of the shaft. The electric lights which were about 20 feet above the bucket and platform were lowered; one of the men who was standing on the platform was guiding the cable, and the other man was doing the signalling. When the electric lights reached the location where the large platform had been removed, the explosion occurred.

The explosion occurred about 27 feet from the bottom of the shaft. According to at least three of the injured employees, the gas was ignited either by one of the light bulbs bursting or by a defective light socket with bare spots in the wiring causing a spark or an arc. After their rescue, the injured persons were walking around on the surface apparently not too seriously injured.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The fan should be operated continuously except when the shaft is shut down with all men on the surface. In such event, after the fan has been started, the shaft should be examined for gas and other hazards and made safe before men, other than the examiners, are permitted in the shaft.

2. Frequent inspections for methane should be made in the shaft during each working shift.

3. Open electric incandescent lamps should not be used for illumination in the shaft, unless they are of the approved type.

4. A fire boss should make an examination of this shaft before other men are permitted to enter and his finding should be recorded.

5. The foremen should have certificates of competency issued by the West Virginia Department of Mines.

6. The vent tubing should be extended at least 5 feet of the bottom of the shaft.

7. All workmen and other persons in the shaft should use only permissible electric cap lamps for portable illumination.

This information is from the full report by

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APPROVED:

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COAL FATALITY
McDOWELL COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
OLGA COAL CO.
OLGA #2-#05333
JUNE 26, 1952

Mr. Fred A. Campbell, Virgil H. Christian, Ulyasus C. Dash and Paul Thompson were killed in a underground explosion accident. They died June 26, 1952 at 5:30 p.m. Mr. Campbell is survived by a widow and 4 children. Mr. Christian is survived by a widow and 7 children. Mr. Dash is survived by a widow and 5 children. Mr. Thompson is survived by a widow and 1 child.