

Explosives Indicated in Nine-Fatality Mine Blast

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CENTRAL CITY, Ky. — Explosives may have caused the blast that killed nine miners Wednesday in the Peabody Coal Co.'s River Queen Mine, an authoritative source said yesterday.

A member of the 15-man rescue team that brought out the bodies, the source said he found evidence that explosives had been carried on an electric drill machine. The machine, he added, had been blown to pieces.

The informant asked that his name not be disclosed.

Company officials declined to comment on the possible role of explosives in the disaster pending an official inspection of the mine scheduled for 8 a.m. today.

'Bad Practice,' Rescuer Says

The River Queen mine is in the heart of the West Kentucky coalfield seven miles west of Central City, 11 miles north of Greenville.

Killed were Paul Creekmore, 44, and Ernest W. Miller, 45, both of Central City; Bobby G. English, 34, Beech Creek; Frankie Epley, 45, Greenville; James Bryant, 25, Cromwell; Robert Fridinger, 38, Madisonville; James Harris, 33, Sacramento; Will Rice, 31, McHenry; and Dennie Saling, 56, Echols.

The rescuer who told of finding evi-

dence that explosives had detonated said carrying explosives on such electrical equipment as a drill machine was "bad practice" and in violation of state and federal law.

He added, "Nobody has explosives on that type of equipment. I believe those people died because somebody goofed."

LRC Asks Legal Review

The official investigation team will be composed of about 16 men representing the Federal Bureau of Mines, Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals, United Mine Workers Union and Peabody Coal.

After the inspection, A. H. Mandt, state commissioner of mines and minerals, will conduct a hearing to seek the cause of the mine disaster, the worst in Kentucky since 1945. The hearing will be 2 p.m. at the State Economic Security Building, Madisonville.

State inspectors said their findings would be available in two to three weeks.

At Frankfort yesterday, the Legislative Research Commission, reacting to the disaster, set in motion the machinery that could lead to stricter state regulation of the coal mining industry.

The LRC directed its staff to review reports on the River Queen disaster by state and federal mine inspectors and

present its findings to an LRC subcommittee, which will determine if state mining laws need revision.

(A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Mines, which officially designated the River Queen blast a "mine disaster," said reports received in Washington indicated that "nothing extraordinary" existed in the way of hazards in the mine. "It was a non-gassy mine . . . no methane was found in the mine," he said.)

In related developments, both Gov. Louie B. Nunn and Lt. Gov. Wendell Ford expressed their sympathies to the families of the nine men killed.

Nunn, in a statement issued from Miami Beach where he is attending the Republican National Convention, said, "Every resource of state government will be made available to find the cause for this tragedy and to pursue with renewed dedication our continuing efforts to make Kentucky's mines the safest in the nation."

Victims Drilling at Seam

At the disaster scene, Merritt Deitz Jr., an aide to Gov. Nunn, said Nunn was deeply disturbed by the disaster and may even leave the GOP convention to attend the Madisonville hearing.

A Peabody spokesman said the miners who died in the explosion were drilling

coal at the mine's four-foot seam when the blast occurred. They were about 1¼ miles from the entrance of the mine, which is a drift mine. Such a mine goes straight back from a high mine wall rather than from a shaft or slope.

The explosion occurred about 12:50 p.m. Wednesday while about 60 miners were working. The trapped miners were in North Unit 2. Other miners in a unit about 1700 feet from the explosion felt the concussions.

An unidentified miner said members of his crew got within 1,200 feet of the trapped fellow workers but could go no farther because of intense heat and dust.

Rescuers entering the mine first found two brattice men, who control the mine's ventilation. One was injured and sent outside. The second man had been knocked several feet by the explosion but was not seriously injured.

Five members of the rescue team were overcome by dust and fumes in their 12-hour attempt to get through the fallen rock to the explosion site.

The worst mine disaster in modern Kentucky history was an explosion July 14, 1939, at the Duvine Mine at Providence, in West Kentucky; 28 miners were killed. More recently, 26 miners were killed by a blast Dec. 26, 1945, in the Straight Creek Mine at Fourmile, in Bell County.

1968 River Queen Mine explosion NEWS3

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Oct 11, 2025