

Four dead, one injured

Inspectors to view site of Wattis cave-in

The deaths of four miners and the serious injury of another in a roof cave-in at the Plateau Mine in Wattis has brought in a team of federal inspectors from Virginia and Denver.

J. Lamar Bishop, subdistrict manager for the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) said Herschel Potter of the Arlington, VA will head the team of nine federal inspectors.

Four inspectors from Virginia and three from the Denver office will team with two local inspectors from the Price MSHA office to conduct the investigation into the causes of the mine accident. Participating from the Price office will be Bishop and Supervising inspectors Fred Tatton.

"The investigation will be conducted to determine the cause of the accident and come up with recommendations and means to prevent a similar occurrence," Bishop stated.

The team of inspectors arrived in Price Monday evening and tentatively scheduled Tuesday as the day to begin the investigation.

The Tuesday investigation was postponed, however, due to the funerals for two of the miners being held in Price.

Killed in the accident were

Michael S. Guzman, 31 of Price; William H. Gentry, Jr., 26 of Price; Kerry Grange, 30 of Huntington; and Tim Nightingale, 20, Carbondale, Colorado.

Injured was Allen Austin, 24 of Helper.

The investigation will begin Wednesday morning. Bishop reported a federal coal mine inspector issued a withdrawal order in the First North section of Plateau's Starpoint No. 1 mine shortly after the accident to "protect the integrity of the evidence that is there."

The findings of the nine-member investigation team will be made public as soon as the investigation is completed and the cause or causes of the accident are determined.

The accident occurred approximately 11:15 o'clock Friday morning, according to a press release issued by Thomas Bailey, UNC Plateau Mining Co. president and general manager.

In releasing the information, Plateau mine official Tracy Bunderson reported there were 10 miners working in the section of the mine when a slab of roof 15' by 15' and from four to eighteen inches thick fell on five of the

miners killing four and injuring the fifth.

The remainder of the 10-man work party was standing at an intersection in the mine and were not struck by the falling rock.

The four dead were listed as dead on arrival at the Carbon Hospital while Austin was admitted in critical condition suffering from a fractured skull, fractured pelvis, fractured ribs and facial lacerations.

A hospital spokesman reported Tuesday night he has been released from the intensive care unit and moved to another section of the hospital where he is listed in fair condition. It was also reported he is still sore and is unable to move from his bed.

The workers were reportedly setting timbers for the next coal extraction when the roof fell in. They had been working with a "continuous miner" but had to move it away from the area to begin preparations for timbering the area.

Timbering is buttressing log poles between the mine floor and ceilings.

The method being used has been described as standard operating procedure in coal

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● *Inspectors view Wattis*

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extraction and the timbering was being conducted to make the area safe.

Following the accident a mood of apprehension in going to work swept through many of the coal mines in the region.

"Every time you go into the portal, you never know if you're going to walk out or be carried out. Every day you just live with it. There's always that anxious feeling at quitting time that I made it another day without getting hurt," one miner.

When asked about the risks and dangers involved in the job, the visibly shaken miner said "it's one of those things that goes with the job."