

Cave-in kills 4 in Utah mine

PRICE, Utah (AP) — Four coal miners who were removing timber supports in a mine south of here were killed in an accident one miner called "one of those things that goes with the job ... you never know if you're going to walk out or be carried out."

The men died when a huge slab of rock fell on them Friday at the Starpoint No. 1 coal mine 20 miles south of Price. The victims were part of a 10-man crew removing timbers from a section that had already been mined, said Floyd Tucker, general superintendent for Plateau Mining Co.

He identified the men as Kerry Grange, Huntington; Mike Guzman, Price; Bill Gentry, Price; and Kim Nightingale, Carbondale, Colo.

Allan Austin of Price was injured, and was in serious but stable condition Friday night at a Price hospital.

Tucker said controlled cave-ins occur as pillars are removed, but the 15-foot by 15-foot slab of rock that fell on the five men was in a section where a cave-in was not expected.

"It's just like a loose piece of plaster on your roof," said Tucker. "It sits there all year, you walk under it and nothing happens. Then the snow comes, and the house settles, and it falls off the ceiling."

He said the chamber where the accident occurred will be sealed off until federal mine safety inspectors from Washington and Denver arrive Tuesday to investigate.

A friend of Austin's, who asked not to be named, said he and other miners were nervous about returning to work. "It makes me not want to go down there," he said.

"It's one of those things that goes with the job," he said. "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."

Because of renewed interest in coal, state officials expect coal to play a major role in the state's economic future. Vast reserves lie beneath federal lands, many of them located in the east-central portion of the state not far from Capitol Reef National Park and other environmentally sensitive areas.

The state's worst coal mining disasters occurred at the turn of the century. On May 1, 1900, an explosion in the Pleasant Valley Coal Company's Mine No. 4 at Scofield killed 200 men and seriously injured seven others. Two years later, in nearby Summit County, 34 men were killed in another coal mine explosion.

In recent years, minor cave-ins and accidents have claimed a few miners at a time. Nine died in 1963 following an explosion in a Helper, Utah, mine.

Speaking of Friday's accident, Utah Industrial Commission chairman Carlyle Browning said, "It's unusual to catch that many men in a cave-in at one time."