

13 miners trapped in Tennessee blast

By John Nolan

Knight-Ridder News Service

WHITWELL, Tenn. — An explosion ripped through a coal mine shaft yesterday, trapping 13 miners 240 feet underground, authorities said. It was the third serious accident in the Appalachian coalfields in the last five days.

Emergency rescue teams equipped with air tanks and masks were attempting to reach the men through a shaft that is only 36 inches wide in some places, a mine company spokesman said.

Mike Caudill, an assistant operations officer with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, said, "There is a problem with the atmosphere inside the mine," but he added that was not unusual after an accident.

He said no contact had been made with the men trapped inside the No. 21 mine, which is about 30 miles northwest of Chattanooga in Marion County, a mountainous area of southeastern Tennessee. Their conditions were unknown.

drop plot

sought more information on the alleged plot. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., said, "This thing has become so hyped up it is taking on a life of its own."

At the White House, Gergen refused to discuss the substance of Reagan's meeting with the National Se-

Steve Blackburn, a spokesman for the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., said no one answered when officials tried to call the miners through an underground telephone from an office three miles from the shaft. None of the miners were identified, but their families were gathering at the company's office.

"We believe 13 people are still trapped 240 feet inside the mine," Caudill said. "Our initial reports are that it was an explosion."

Blackburn said rescue personnel from the company and the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration were being forced to crawl on their hands and knees in some places because the shaft is so narrow.

The teams, he said, would stop about every 60 feet to check the condition of the shaft.

"They got to check where they've been and where they're going," Blackburn said. He said the teams would also check power lines running to equipment in the mine as they moved through the shaft.

Blackburn said the Tennessee Highway Patrol had blocked the road leading to the mine.

Caudill said the Tennessee Mine Disaster team from the state Labor Department was also on the scene, along with the Marion County Sheriff's office and the Emergency Management Agency, the new name for the state Civil Defense.