

Explosion traps 7 in Floyd mine

Three men were found dead and four others were still missing Wednesday night after a coal mine explosion near McDowell in Floyd County.

At Mountain Eagle presstime, rescue teams were still trying to reach the four miners still inside the No. 1 mine of RFH Coal Company at Mink Branch in the community of Craynor. The mine is believed to be a family operation, with a father, two sons and other relatives working there.

Residents of the area said the explosion, which occurred about 10 a. m. Wednesday, shook the surrounding countryside. A federal mine inspector who was in the area reportedly saw a part of the mine ventilating fan blown across a hill.

Early last night, mine safety officials in Washington, D. C., said indications were that the explosion was a "powder explosion," caused by material used to blast coal from the mine face.

They said there was a slight amount of methane present but they could not tell if it played any part in the explosion.

The first two of four rescue teams entered the mine

shortly after noon and established a fresh air base at the seventh crosscut — about 150 feet inside the mine. One team went beyond the fresh air base but had to pull back when one of its members became ill. A second team went beyond the air base at about 5 p. m., and the bodies of three miners were reported found about three hours later.

The three miners who were found apparently were either entering or leaving the mine and thus were not with the rest of the crew underground, rescuers speculated. The bodies were located about 700 feet from the drift mouth.

Records of the Mine Safety and Health Administration in Washington indicated that the small mine includes only one section, that it normally works six miners underground and two on the surface, that it operates only one shift a day, that the coal seam it is working is 36 to 40 inches high and that it is represented by the United Mine Workers of America. Such mines normally have entries for haulage and ventilation.

Governor John Y. Brown and UMWA President Sam Church Jr. were reported on

the way to the disaster site.

Names of the three miners whose bodies were found were not released, and the bodies were not brought to the outside immediately.

As the rescue efforts continued, MSHA's new director, Ford B. Ford, was in Beckley, W. Va., to unveil his agency's plans for "lightening" federal requirements for mine inspections. Washington sources said Ford was expected to announce a new system of "compliance assistance visits" (CAV's) under which federal mine inspectors would point out possible danger points and violations of safety regulations to mine operators but would issue no citations. Such visits would carry no enforcement powers and no penalties for failure to take the suggested action. Ford also was expected to announce an "honor system" under which follow-up inspections by federal mine safety officials after violations of safety rules were discovered would be reduced, putting the mine operator on his honor to take the required action. Mine safety advocates say the follow-up visits often are the most important tools in enforcing safety rules.