

Officials probe mine explosion

By TOM EBLEN

Associated Press

PIKEVILLE — Some of the seven men killed in an eastern Kentucky coal mine explosion died instantly, but some lived long enough to try to put on emergency respirators, a coroner said Thursday.

Autopsies were performed on the bodies at Pikeville Methodist Hospital.

A state official said, meanwhile, that all the miners had been in an explosives training session last Friday.

The explosion Wednesday in the family-owned RFH Coal Co.'s No. 1 mine near the Floyd County community of Craynor was the fourth Appalachian coal mine disaster in seven weeks. Thirty-one men have died.

At the hospital, Floyd County Coroner Roger Nelson said not all the miners died immediately in Wednesday's explosion.

"There's three or four that could possibly have lived a minute or two," Nelson said. "Some of them did, there's no doubt about that. There was a respirator or two that was pulled, but they never got them on."

David Jones of the state medical examiner's office, who also was

performing autopsies, told a hospital news conference that of the seven victims, Jack Hamilton, 36, Bernis Hamilton, 31, and Wade Hamilton, 23, all died of internal injuries apparently caused by the explosion.

He said Donald Ray Hamilton, 39, Palmer Edmund McKinney, 26, Thurman Reynolds, 25 and Ronnie Hall, 25, evidently died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

"It's the same type of death that you would get in a house fire," Jones said. "In essence what they did was inhale fire."

He said blood samples would be sent to a state laboratory in Frankfort to confirm the conclusions.

Jones said the men who died of internal injuries died instantly, and the others lived only seconds after the blast — "three, four or five breaths, not very long."

Officials were meeting with the miners' families Thursday to help make funeral arrangements. They said six of the bodies would be released to Hall Brothers Funeral Home at Martin. The body of Ronnie Hall was to be released to R.S. Jones & Son Funeral Home in Virgie.

(Please see MINE, back page)