

Miner Saved by Sick Call Mourns 27 Who Died

United Press International

ORANGEVILLE, Utah — A coal miner whose life was saved because he called in sick last week says he is glad he could spend Christmas with his family but feels bad for the relatives of his 27 fellow workers who died in the Wilberg coal mine fire.

Frank Maderra, of East Carbon, opened presents with his children

yesterday, but the normal joy of Christmas was not with him. If he had gone to work last Wednesday, he probably would have died with 27 other miners when fire broke out near the entrance of a work section about two hours before the shift was scheduled to end.

"I have Christmas with my family and friends, but they [the families of

the victims] don't have a family together anymore. I feel, well, I feel real bad," he said.

Maderra called in sick for the fatal shift and was home when the fire choked off the lives of six company executives and 21 miners, including one woman.

He and Kenneth Blake, who escaped from the tunnel after the fire

erupted, are the only two survivors from the crew that was reportedly attempting to set a world production record when the accident claimed their lives.

Leaders of the Mormon Church planned a general memorial service for the victims at Emery High School in nearby Castle Dale.

More than a half-dozen private memorial services were also scheduled for individual victims, including James Hamlin, vice president of operations for Emery Mining Co., operator of the Wilberg mine.

"What would you do with all the presents marked for Dad?" asked Kathy Pugliese, whose husband is a coal miner who was not among the dead. "You'd have to take [the presents] away; you couldn't leave them sitting there."

"It's a sensitive thing, but it may be that the mine is permanently sealed," said spokesman Bob Henrie of Emery Mining Corp., operating company of the Wilberg mine and four other coal mines high on the side of East Mountain in central Utah's coal-rich Wasatch Plateau, 120 miles southeast of Salt Lake City.

The fire broke out nearly a mile into the mine, trapping the victims in a dead-end tunnel. About 70 others working in different areas escaped

before poisonous carbon monoxide fumes filled the cavern.

The roaring blaze, fed by coal and methane gas, has frustrated every effort by firefighters to put it under control. After 25 bodies were found, Emery officials decided sealing the mine was the only safe way to snuff out the flames.

But the fire gained new strength early Sunday and expanded into an adjacent tunnel. That forced the company to pull out workers attempting to seal off eight tunnels to stop the flow of oxygen to the fire.

"There is a possibility the sealed portion may never be opened again," Henrie said. "We don't want to create false hopes because, depending on what the fire does, there may not be any remains to recover."

Henrie said the company "will not risk life" by sending rescuers back inside just to recover the dead.

The Wilberg mine fire was responsible for one more death, this one indirectly, Emery Mining Co. officials learned Monday.

Officials confirmed that a Pasadena, Md., man, James A. Moore, 62, who flew to Orangeville to aid in the efforts to find the 27 trapped miners, died of a heart attack in a nearby motel several hours later.

Utah Mine Fire May Cost 800 Jobs

United Press International

HUNTINGTON, Utah — The Wilberg Mine disaster that claimed 27 lives last week has possible economic ramifications, threatening the jobs of nearly 800 other miners and Emery County's businesses that depend on those wages.

The deadly fire, still blazing for a sixth day, forced Emery Mining Corp. officials yesterday to decide that sealing the tunnels was the only safe way to smother the flames.

The adjacent Deseret Mine, also operated by Emery for owner Utah Power & Light Company, was sealed earlier in an unsuccessful effort to snuff out a 1983 December fire. There were no deaths in that blaze.

The Wilberg Mine was closed indefinitely after the fire claimed the lives of six Emery Mining executives and 21 miners.

Those problems have increased fears in nearby coal towns along the Wasatch Plateau more than 100 miles southeast of Salt Lake City that major layoffs might be the next misfortune. About 800 miners live in those coal towns.

"It not only affects the miners, but all the companies supplying them and the businesses where miners spend their money," said Orangeville Mayor Tom Humphrey who worked in the Deseret Mine before its closure.

The Deseret Mine is part of a consolidated operation including the

Beehive and Little Dove mines.

Emery Mining spokesman Bob Henrie said, "There is a possibility the sealed portion of the Wilberg Mine may not ever go back into production again."

"It all depends on when we get the fire out, how far it's burned and how realistic it is to resume production there," Henrie said.

He said a decision on whether to reopen the Little Dove mine will not be made until after Christmas. However, Henrie added the Wilberg "may be permanently sealed."

Mike Dalpiaz, MW District 22 president, said the union has "several very, very serious concerns" about safety conditions in the Emery mines.

1984 Wilberg Mine fire NEWS

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