



Stewart Foster, 46, of Price, takes a break from efforts to locate and rescue fellow miners trapped in the Wilberg Mine.

## 'Christmas doesn't mean much when things like this happen'

Steve McMillan  
Daily Sentinel

CASTLE DALE, Utah — The first day of winter dawned Friday with a chill colder than any ever experienced by the residents of seven small, eastern Utah coal mining towns.

News that nine of the 27 coal miners trapped in Wilberg Mine near here were dead vanquished the hopes of families, friends and neighbors for a happy holiday season.

"With those bodies they found today, I'm sure there will be a half-dozen funerals Christmas Eve," said Barry Jensen, the owner of a

fast-food restaurant in Huntington.

A foot of fresh snow blanketed Huntington and the Manti-La Sal Mountain Range to its west where Wilberg Mine is located.

Five of the miners trapped Wednesday night in an underground tunnel by a raging fire are from Huntington, population 2,500. The others are from six towns within a 30-mile radius: Price, East Carbon, Castle Dale, Orangeville, Ferron and Fillmore.

While rescue efforts for the 18 unaccounted for miners continued late Friday afternoon, wives learned they were widows and children were orphans.

Please check Christmas, page 10A

# Death toll climbs to 13 in mine fire

Steve McMillan  
Daily Sentinel  
with wire reports

HUNTINGTON, Utah — The death toll climbed to 13 at the Wilberg Mine as rescue workers found the bodies of four more coal miners between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. Friday.

The four dead miners, who have not been identified, were found about 700 feet deep in a feeder tunnel in the underground mine. That's 500 feet from the spot a rescue crew discovered nine bodies Friday morning.

All 13 miners apparently were overcome by poisonous smoke from a fire that started Wednesday night and trapped them in the mine 15 miles west of here.

"The possibility exists we will find more bodies along the way (through the tunnel)," said Bob Henrie, a spokesman for Emery Mining Corp., which operates Wilberg Mine.

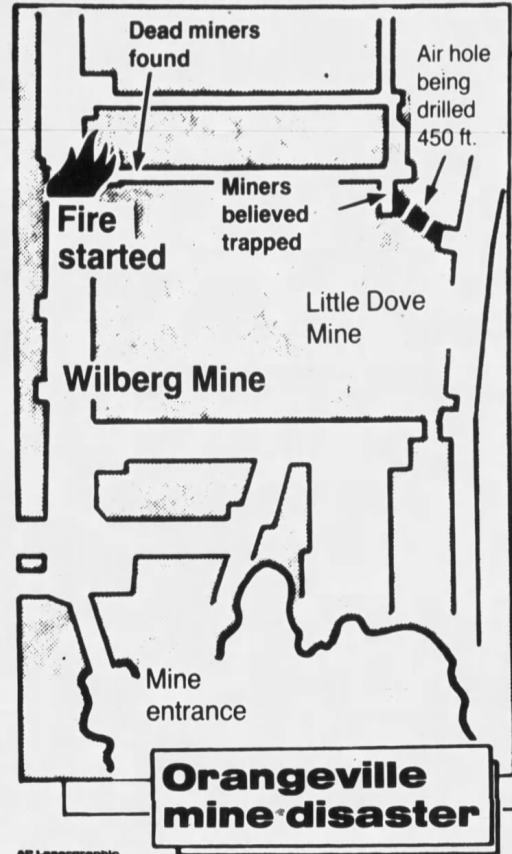
Emery released the names of the nine Utah men found dead Friday morning. They include:

James Hamlin, 37, Price, the vice president of operations and production; David William Bocook, 41, Price, the mine manager; Alex Poulos, 33, Price, longwall section foreman; Vic Cingolani, 33, Huntington, general mine foreman; LeRoy Milton Hersh, 60, East Carbon, service foreman; Philip Bell, 28, Orangeville, longwall coordinator; Randall P. Curry, 31, Orangeville, longwall mechanic; Roger Ellis, 28, Ferron, loading machine operator; Lee Johansen, 35, Ferron, mechanic.

Both groups of dead miners were proceeding down the east-west feeder tunnel to the main north-south tunnel, which leads out of the mine. The fire, which is believed to have started in a conveyor belt used to transport coal, was at the juncture of the two tunnels.

"The indication is many of them (the miners) did try to evacuate the mine rather than retreat into a safe retreat area," said Henrie.

Emery officials had hoped the 26 male miners and one female miner had moved down the 1,900-foot feeder tunnel away from the fire.



AP Laserphoto

There is a chamber at the end of the tunnel officials hoped the miners had barricaded themselves in to keep out the toxic fumes. Officials are still hoping that the 14 missing miners are in that chamber.

Mine officials are attempting to drill two air holes into that chamber.

One of the holes is being bored through a 600-foot wall to the east

and should be complete by this morning, said Noel Milan, a public affairs officer with the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration.

The other hole was being drilled from the top of East Mountain down to the chamber, but Milan didn't know how long it would take to breach the 1,800 feet.

At 8 p.m., a five-member rescue team was on its way.

Please check Mine, page 10A

1984 Wilberg Mine fire NEWS1

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# Mine

From Page One

crew continued to inch its way down the feeder tunnel. The crew was roped together and was systematically checking behind pillars along the passageway, said Wayne Horscroft, another Emery Mining spokesman.

Two other crews were fighting the fire in the main tunnel with foam and water. That blaze was contained about 7 p.m., said John McGrath, a MSHA public affairs officer. Containment means the fire is not spreading.

MSHA officials were at the mine, which employs 350 miners, assisting in rescue efforts. Heavy equipment also has been brought in from throughout Utah, and a special medical mine rescue team is on the scene from Pittsburgh, Pa.

Milan said no investigation into the cause of the fire would be conducted until rescue operations ceased.

"Our top priority now is trying to locate those (14) people," said Milan. "We are certainly not going to make any kind of comment on the management practices until the investigation is complete."

MSHA will do extensive interviews with people involved in the fire during its investigation, he said.

The 27 miners and Emery executives in the mine were attempting

to set a 24-hour record for tonnage mining a longwall. Horscroft said they would have had to mine about 25,000 tons during the day to set the world record.

Longwall operations involve removal of coal from a seam for an extensive length, with the deliberate collapse of the mine roof behind as the working area advances. In other types of mines, columns of coal are left standing to hold up the roof.

At a news conference in Washington, D.C., Friday, United Mine Workers of America President Richard Trumka blasted Emery Mining Corp. for its attempts at the world record. He said the safety of the miners should have been the foremost consideration.

Trumka said the Wilberg Mine used a design the United Mine Workers union considers unsafe and "was not operating the way it should be operating."

However, he did not actually call the mine unsafe. He said such questions should be addressed when rescue efforts are completed.

Displaying a map of the mine, Trumka noted that Wilberg's longwall mining area had only two entry routes. "This is a very, very unusual situation, a two-entry system," he said.

Trumka said most longwall systems have three entries, but that "mine workers believe it takes four

entries to be safe" because they provide more escape routes.

Although the union generally has sought four entries in mine construction, he said, it had not raised that point about the Wilberg Mine.

Trumka said a "return escape-way" was "completely impassable because it had caved in."

Also, he noted, the Wilberg Mine's accident rate in 1982 was three times the national average and was above average in 1983 and so far in 1984.

"I would have to say, to me, that mine to that extent was not operating the way it should be operating," Trumka said. "We've had safety complaints from our members."

He did not detail those complaints, and refused to go beyond his description of the mine. Trumka did say that a recent inspection of the mine found dust concentrations 70 percent above permissible levels.

Noting reports that the company was trying to set a one-day production record for longwall mining, Trumka said, "In the long run a safer mine is a more productive mine."

When operators attempt short-term production records, "safety is made an afterthought and miners are killed ... (It is) an unacceptable race toward death," he said.

Asked how such a production ef-

fort might have contributed to the disaster, Trumka replied, "We're not sure at this time and that's not our principal focus. Our major concern at this time is to get to the remaining people."

"I would say in some way it contributed. How much, I don't know," he said.

The trapped miners were "very experienced," Trumka said, and could survive possibly through the weekend if they were able to erect a barrier of some kind with materials on hand, such as canvas, that was far enough away from the fire.

He declined to comment on the adequacy of rescue operations, but said the union will analyze them when they are over.

Meanwhile, at UMWA's Local 7621 union hall in Orangeville, eight miles southeast of the Wilberg Mine, miners also questioned the decision to attempt a production record.

"We're just in a state of panic waiting for the news," said one miner. "There is really nothing you can do but sit here and wait and hope for the best."

He stood against the bar and watched water drip from a leaky ceiling into two buckets. Another miner was angrier.

"They (mine officials) got their record all right. Not the one they were looking for, but they got their record," he said.

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