

Mine Fire That Killed 9 Threatens 5 Rescuers

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ORANGEVILLE, Utah — A fire that killed nine miners in a coal mine burned out of control Friday, threatening a crew of five rescue workers trying to find 18 people missing for two days.

Emery Mining Corp. officials said Friday that they were working to douse the fire and save the specially trained rescue team in the Wilberg Mine, 115 miles southeast of Salt Lake City.

Rescue workers had groped through smoke, deadly gas and falling debris in the mine Friday morning and discovered the bodies of nine of the 27 people trapped since Wednesday night.

Company officials withheld the identities of the nine pending notification of their families. Mining company spokesman Bob Henrie said workmen had been removing their bodies from the mine when the fire flared up early Friday afternoon.

The fire caused more smoke in the tunnel and was burning out of control 4,500 feet inside the mountain.

The smoke and fire became so intense, Henrie said, that the rescue effort was put on hold while workers tried to control the burning coal seam.

"The men have encountered a number of hot spots and were forced to turn back," he said. "Their main job is now to get out to let us work on the fire."

The five-man rescue crew members wore special fireproof suits and carrying portable oxygen tanks. They were trying to reach a safety chamber about 2,600 feet past the spot where the bodies were found. Officials hope the 18 missing individuals took refuge in the chamber.

There has been no contact with the trapped people, but officials were optimistic that the miners had enough air to survive — if they succeeded in barricading themselves behind protective curtains in the chamber.

Henrie said crews were drilling holes in from the adjacent Deer Creek Mine to pump water into the burning portions of the Wilberg. Water shortages have plagued the fire

control and rescue efforts.

An air shaft was also being drilled from the adjoining Little Dove mine into the area of the safety chamber.

The mine is made up of horizontal tunnels drilled into the side of a mountain. There are no vertical shafts.

Henrie said the rescue crew had found the bodies in the first third of a 3,000-foot tunnel that extended past the fire, indicating those victims had been trying to escape from the mine rather than retreat to the safety chamber. They were apparently overcome by the smoke and carbon monoxide.

Henrie said, "Kenneth Blake, the

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