

9 more bodies found in mine fire

The Associated Press

ORANGEVILLE, Utah — A search team discovered the bodies of nine more miners late yesterday, bringing to 22 the number of workers killed following a smoky mine fire that erupted three days ago, officials said.

Five miners were still unaccounted for and believed dead.

"We believe there will be no survivors," said Emery Mining Company spokesman Robert Henrie. "They are looking for the bodies. It could be several more hours before those bodies are located."

The miners — 26 men and one woman — were trapped Wednesday when fire broke out as they tried to break a one-day production record at the Wilberg Mine, operated by Emery Mining for Utah Power & Light.

Thirteen bodies were found Friday, but the fire flared up again early yesterday, and rescuers were not able to get back into the mine until yesterday afternoon.

Then they advanced rapidly, and, finding the air clearing, hopes revived that some of the trapped miners might still be alive.

But late yesterday they found more bodies in a work area.

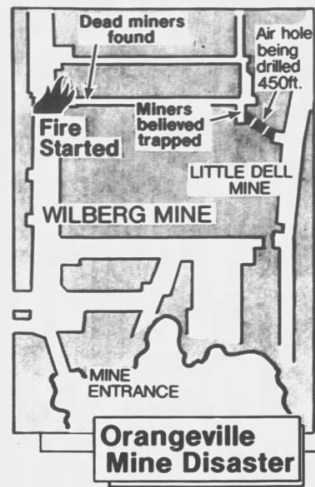
"An attempt was made to establish a barricade," Henrie said.

Asked how long they might have lived, he said, "We don't expect it

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9 more bodies found in mine; toll hits 20



Map shows location of air shaft being drilled by rescuers.

Remaining miners believed dead

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was very long." Emery Mining President Neal Savage told the families that all the miners were believed dead, the spokesman said.

The rescue effort has not been canceled. They are continuing to look for the unaccounted for, Henrie said.

The bodies of six men and one woman were found late yesterday in a ventilation passage in the rear portion of the mine, he said.

The bodies were close to the long wall face where the miners were working when the fire broke out. It appeared they had not tried to escape and had not gone into the safety chamber, Henrie said.

"It would appear it happened quite quickly. They were not in the same general area," he said.

Breathing apparatus was in the area where the bodies were found, and it looked like they had attempted to form a seal over the tunnel, but it was not successful.

Crews were going to continue to remove the bodies before they undertook a full-scale effort to contain the fire, he said.

A flare-up of the fire that trapped the 27 miners Wednesday night had driven back rescuers through a mile of smoky tunnels earlier yesterday. Fumes cleared most of the smoke, but visibility was about 30 feet yesterday afternoon.

Earlier plans to drill a "long shot" tunnel from the adjacent Little Dove Mine directly into the deep mountain chamber were set aside as res-

cues moved more quickly down the main tunnel.

Kathy Riddle, whose 28-year-old husband, Kelly, was among those

"If you didn't have a little reserve of guarded optimism, I don't think you could do this job. A rescue effort always proceeds with the hope that survivors will be found."

— federal mining official John McGrath

trapped in the mine, said she was angered by assurances from mine officials.

"Instead of just saying 'no comment,' they'll tell you things are fine.

Well, things are not fine," she said. "Just like last night, in an hour and a half they should have been out. Well, they haven't made any progress. There's hot coals, they're backing out. You don't know what to believe."

In addition to moving along the coal tunnel, workers also drilled three-inch bore holes from the top of the mountain and from Little Dove, with mixed results, Henrie said. By late afternoon, workers drilling the horizontal air hole from Little Dove were only 120 feet from the safe chamber.

Little progress was made overnight on a vertical hole being drilled to the chamber from the top of snow-covered East Mountain because of the cold weather, he said. Henrie said federal officials had ordered workers not to remove any of the bodies because "of the limited amount of time to recover any of the survivors."

The fire, believed to have been caused by an overheated bearing in a conveyor belt, erupted as the workers were mining a 12-foot-thick



Robert Henrie

A changeable schedule

seam of coal in the mine eight miles north of Orangeville and 110 miles southeast of Salt Lake city.

One member of that group escaped. A fire alarm alerted 80 workers elsewhere in the mine and they evacuated safely.

A coal-black Christmas in Carbon County, Utah

By James Coates
Chicago Tribune

HUNTINGTON, Utah — The Wilberg mine disaster has cast its pall over Christmas preparations in this tightly knit mining town.

Wives, mothers, fathers, children, and other relatives of the 27 inside the mine gathered at headquarters of the Emery Mining Company, which owns the mine, to keep vigil as the bodies were found.

As families arrived, Carbon County deputies escorted them past crowds of reporters. Most relatives were unwilling to speak of their feelings, but Francy Handley spoke for many of them.

Handley, 58, a mother of four sons, spent her time bringing food to the anxious relatives, who were kept secluded in a conference room.

When asked why she kept bringing a stream of sweet rolls, submarine sandwiches, pizzas, and tacos when the relatives clearly had little rest for food, Handley began crying and explained:

"I know, oh, how I know what they are going through. I lost one son in the [Emery] Deer Creek mine, and another son was so badly hurt [in another Emery coal mine] that he can't work anymore."

"People got to keep going, so I bring them food. They don't want it, but they've got to have the strength to go on."

She said that though her son Jim Leroy was killed at age 34 when a mine roof collapsed, and 34-year-old Fred was badly injured in a similar accident, her two other sons, Greg, 36, and Paul, 25, were on the rescue crew at the Wilberg mine.

"At one time I had four boys in the mines," Handley recalled. "I had one son on every shift and there never was peace. Every time I heard the ambulance go by with their sirens, I died."

Mining is dangerous, she said, "but what else is a boy



Francy Handley, who brought food to miners' families as they awaited the news.

going to do here. When a boy gets to be 18 in Carbon County, he has to find something in the mines or he has to leave the county."

"No question about it, coal mining is a hazardous profession," said Emery Mining spokesman Robert Henrie. "You are sending people a mile deep into Mother Nature's Earth and asking them to move gigantic machinery about in dark, crowded, and noisy places."

The tragedy struck at all levels in Utah's Carbon County society, where life is centered on the 15 operating coal mines that produce ore for utilities as far east as Illinois.

For the management elite — the aristocracy in the mining towns of Price, Huntington, and Castle Dale — the loss was six of their own.

The first two bodies found were those of James Hamlin, 37, vice-president for production for the entire Emery company, and David Rocco, 41, chief of the 350-strong work force at the Wilberg mine.

Found nearby were the bodies of four other Emery executives in charge of the lucrative longwall mining technique that the company considers crucial to profitability.

Longwall mining uses conveyor belts to move coal rapidly for up to a mile from an underground coal seam to the mouth of the mine.

Visibly choked with emotion over the loss of his own friends, Henrie conceded that when the fire started the crew had been using the longwall process in a drive to set a record for coal extraction.

Critics questioned early in the crisis whether the executives were running the conveyor belts too quickly, thereby causing a bearing to overheat and ignite coal in the mine.

Fueled by questions about whether the race to set a longwall record caused the deaths, Henrie retorted: "That's outrageous."

Throughout the ordeal, the tension permeated life in this more-isolated town of 200 families in Utah's predominantly Mormon back country.

Off-shift miners gravitated toward the UMW Local 2175 meeting hall in Orangeville, about five miles from the Wilberg mine. The hall is one of the few places in Carbon County, which is "dry," where they can gather over a bottle of beer.

The miners at the bar speculated about what went wrong, and they vented their anger.

"Chuck," a beefy American Indian, pounded a ham-like fist against a barstool and said, "We're sitting here trying to be real mellow about this, but it isn't easy knowing that you got friends down there dead knowing that next time it's maybe going to be you."



Smoke billowing from the mine.

Safety neglected, says union

Record production goal cited

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The president of the United Mine Workers says efforts to set a one-day production record at the Wilberg Mine in Central Utah contributed to the fire that killed 13 miners and trapped 14 others underground.

As rescue workers fought dust and flying coal in the mine near Orangeville, union President Richard Trumka called attempts by mining companies to set short-term production records "an unacceptable race toward death."

"Safety becomes an afterthought and miners are killed," Trumka told a Washington news conference. He said he was "not sure at this time" how much the production drive contributed to the fire.

"I would say in some way it contributed," Trumka said. "How

much, I don't know."

He said the union's first concern was rescue of the remaining miners who have been trapped since Wednesday.

The trapped miners were "very experienced," Trumka said, and might survive the weekend if they could rig a fire barrier.

"Very, very unusual"

Displaying a map, Trumka described the mine as being of longwall design with two entries, which he called "a very, very unusual situation."

Three entries is more common, and "mine workers believe it takes four entries to be safe" because they provide more escape routes, he said.

In longwall operations, the tunnel is allowed to fall in after the coal has been removed and the miners have moved to a new

working area. In other designs, columns of coal remain standing to prevent collapse.

Trumka said the union generally had sought four entries in mine construction but not at the Wilberg Mine. He said a "return escapeway" was "completely impossible because it had caved in."

Trumka said the Wilberg mine's accident rate in 1982 was three times the national average. He said it exceeded the 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. He said a recent inspection had found dust concentrations 70 percent above permissible levels.

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