

Pike coal miner trapped by roof fall is rescued unharmed

By ROB WELLS
Associated Press

PIKEVILLE, Ky. — A Pike County coal miner, trapped for five hours by a roof fall, emerged unharmed after rescuers dug through a thick pile of rocks and coal with their hands.

Herman Coleman, 41, drove home after being rescued from the TM Coal Co. mine late Tuesday night.

"It's kind of hard to explain," said Coleman, who had been working at the mine

just two days. "It's just one of those things that will happen to miners as long as we work underground."

He was operating a coal-cutting machine when a section of the roof fell about 6:30 p.m. Five other men were in the mine at the time of the cave-in, but they were in an entryway and were not trapped, he said.

"The roof was supported the way it was supposed to have been," said Coleman, who has 28 years' experience in the industry. "It was just one of those freak accidents."

Coleman was extricated about 11:30 p.m., said David Phillips, director of the state Department of Mines and Minerals office in Pikeville.

"He (Coleman) told me, 'I drank a whole thermos of coffee while I was waiting for you to come and get me,'" Phillips said.

"It's very refreshing to receive a call that you've got somebody under a roof fall and are able to get a man out alive," Phillips said. "It's very satisfying." Coleman was examined by emergency

medical technicians at the scene, given a clean bill of health and then allowed to drive home.

"We checked his blood pressure and it was close to normal," Phillips said. "He didn't seem to be panicked."

Coleman replied, "When you panic, you die. I was scared, don't get me wrong," he added. "You just have to be there to experience it, I guess."

The miner commended his rescuers for "one heck of a job." The six rescuers were hindered by an

unstable roof and a pile of debris 25 feet wide by 12 feet thick, Phillips said.

"We had some really adverse roof conditions," he said. "That's why it took so long. I had to make sure it was safe enough for my rescue team."

The mine has been closed pending a routine review by state mine safety investigators, Phillips said. Mine owner Terry Moore could not be reached for comment.

The mine could resume production soon if investigators turn up no further problems, Phillips said.

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