

## Two miners killed in roof collapse

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Associated Press Writer

WHITWELL, Tenn. — Federal investigators will try to determine today what caused a 100-foot-long, 14-foot-wide rock to fall in an underground coal mine, killing two miners and injuring two others, officials said.

Dennis "Dink" Nunley and Charles Bevin, ages unavailable, died in a Monday morning collapse at Whitwell Mine 30, a remote location on Daus Mountain about 50 miles northeast of Chattanooga, officials said.

Robert Dempsey was rescued after 10 hours and taken to Erlanger Medical Center in Chattanooga for emergency treatment Monday night, officials said. He had to have at least two fingers amputated as part of the rescue, officials said, and was in undetermined but apparently non-life threatening condition early today.

The fourth miner, William Watts, was in good condition at Whitwell Medical Center with bruises on his head and cuts on his scalp.

"There was a massive ground movement," said Kirby Smith, a federal inspector for the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration. "We believe it was a geological factor."

Smith said a federal inspector from Ohio will be at the mine today to investigate the collapse.

About 12 employees were in the mine when the accident occurred, Smith said.

He said some miners reported hearing a rumble and noticed the rock moving and scrambled to get out.

Rescuers from Marion, Sequatchie and Hamilton counties worked to get the men out of the mine. Dempsey was able to communicate with rescuers, including a team of doctors from Erlanger, directing them to his location, Smith said.

"He was inside a machine, which is what saved him," he said. It was not clear what the machine was.

Rescuers used jack hammers to cut through the rock before retrieving the dead miners' bodies late Monday night, officials said.

About 60 people, including miners' families and concerned community members, sat in somber silence at a mine training center about four miles away, waiting for news Monday night.

James Earl Nunley, whose JEN Inc. operates the mine under a lease agreement with Tennessee Consolidated Mine Co., asked everyone except immediate family to step outside the center about 9



AP Wirephoto

Friends and family wait for news at the training center of Whitwell Mine 30, where two coal miners were killed and two injured after a roof collapsed Monday morning. The mine is located about 50 miles northeast of Chattanooga, Tenn.

p.m. EST. When he announced the names of the miners killed in the accident, wailing and crying could be heard through the shut windows. Nunley is not closely related to the miner who was killed, officials said.

Family members declined to comment.

"A lot of people will be spending tonight together, trying to help each other through this," said Deb Troyer of Whitwell, who came to the site to offer her support to family members.

"This is such a small community. We all know each other and grew up together. When something like this happens to one of us, it happens to all of us."

Smith said families of the miners who escaped were worried for hours and uncertain of their fate because the miners stayed at the site.

"The miners wouldn't leave because they wouldn't want to be left," Smith said. "They wanted to make sure he (Dempsey) was OK before they saw their own families. That tells you something about the dedication of these miners."

Rescuers removed rock and rebuilt a support structure as they worked toward the two dead men. They stacked 36-inch long blocks to support the roof as they worked.

Coal mining is the primary occupation in the rural area of southeastern Tennessee.

K.R. Franklin, who has worked in several Whitwell mines, waited outside the mine with others watching the rescue efforts.

Rodney Brown of the safety and health administration in Arlington, Va., said the mine was cited for violating safety standards on roof supports six times in 1991, nine times last year and once for the federal fiscal year, which began in October.

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