

Dramatic rescue saves Berks teens

Lifting the four youths from bottom of 100-foot mineshaft took seven hours and more than 50 emergency workers.

By **Andrew McGill**
OF THE MORNING CALL

The four teenagers huddled at the bottom of the mineshaft, any hope of rescue more than 100 feet above them. It was already below 30 degrees Fahrenheit — none was wearing anything heavier than a sweatshirt — and it was getting colder.

From that vantage point, the dark sky impossibly distant, a firefighter's voice must have sounded like Superman's.

"They were shook up," said Randy Sicher, fire chief of Topton Volunteer Fire Company in Berks County. "I kept them calm, and they did everything that we asked them to. The main thing was just trying to get them out."

More than 50 rescue workers labored for

seven hours Saturday morning to hoist four Berks teenage boys to safety after they found themselves trapped at the bottom of an old mineshaft in Longswamp Township.

Camping with four others near Bear Creek Mountain Resort, the teens decided to climb down the mineshaft to explore surrounding caves, Sicher said. A youthful indiscretion, a good story for the grandkids — until one of them lost his grip after making it more than halfway down.

The unidentified boy fell 30 feet to the shaft's floor, knocking himself unconscious. Three of his friends climbed down to make sure he was OK — and realized they couldn't get out, either.

They called police, and the remaining campers hiked out half a mile through dense woods to meet rescue officers. From there, emergency officials shuttled supplies in via all-terrain vehicle.

Sicher's crew thought it had the situation well in hand, sending down firefighter jackets and hand warmers to the shivering teens. But as dawn approached, Topton emergency workers realized the shaft was much deeper than they expected.

Enter the Lehigh County Technical Rescue team, which rappelled down four rescuers to attend to the stricken campers. With hypothermia setting in, paramedics administered warm intravenous fluids to boost their body temperatures.

Finally, around 9 a.m., the last teen was hoisted to the surface. The rescued boys were taken to Lehigh Valley Hospital-Cedar Crest for treatment of hypothermia and the fall victim's head injury.

As far as he knows, the teens were just looking to explore the caves and "mess around," Sicher said. It's up to state police whether charges will be filed.

The all-hands-on-deck operation, with eight emergency agencies pitching in, was by far the largest Sicher has ever participated in.

"I've never been involved in something this big," he said. "You're going through the woods in the dark, the kids are trying to tell you how to get there ... we weren't really sure what we were getting into."

andrew.mcgill@mcall.com
610-820-6533

2010 Four youths rescued from abandoned mine after seven hours

Clipped By:



usmra_rob
Sat, Jul 3, 2021