

Miner trapped 11½ hours

Heavy machine kept him from being crushed by cave-in

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PRENTER, W.Va. — A coal miner stuck behind tons of rubble for 11½ hours says all he could think about while he was trapped was his family.

Cecil Hager, 32, was treated and released early today at the Charleston Area Medical Center after being brought to safety out of Peabody Coal Co.'s Big Mountain Mine No. 1 shortly before midnight Wednesday.

Hager, back at his Prenter area home, said he's alive because he stayed inside his continuous-mining machine after the cave-in.

"I stayed in it and didn't get out. If I had gotten out, it would have killed me," he said. "I got bruised up pretty bad with minor lacerations on my arms, belly, and my back; both my legs are bruised up."

Hager said he and his wife have also discussed his returning to work in the central Boone County mine. He said he probably would return.

Mark Scott, director of mines and minerals for the state Department of Energy, said Hager was trapped under about 14 feet of rubble by a "massive fall" at noon Wednesday.

Scott said workers told him the cave-in occurred as Hager and two other miners were pulling out support pillars in an operation called "retreat mining," which allows miners to extract as much coal as possible before a mine section is closed.

The two other workers escaped from the 5-foot-high shaft unharmed.

Bart Lay, deputy director of the mines division, said he didn't know exactly how deep into the mine the workers were, "but they were in a good way."

Scott said rescue workers believed that Hager was working under the canopy of a continuous mining machine at the time of the cave-in and was protected from the falling rock.

"Those machines can withstand a lot," he said.

Cecil_Hager_rescued_from_Big_Mountain_Mine

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