Reports

Hailey-Oklahoma Coal Company

Report on the Fire in

Mine No. 1

Hailey-Oklahoma Coal Company

Haileyville, Pittsburgh County, Oklahoma

August 26, 1908

by

William Cameron
Bureau of Mines

FIRE IN MINE NO. 1, HAILEYVILLE, OKLAHOMA.

A fire originated August 26, 1908, at about 8:30 A. M. in Mine No. 1, operated by the Hailey-Oklahoma Coal Company, at Haileyville, Pittsburg county, Oklahoma, causing the death of twenty-nine men and seventeen mules. The fire occurred in the main east entry near the bottom of the shaft and was started by a driver igniting a tub of lubricating oil.

The shaft is 320 feet deep, at which point it cuts through the Lower Hartshorne Coal Seam. This seam dips 13 to 18 degrees to the north. The mine is ventilated by one Sullivan 10-ft. fan which at 225 r.p.m. produces 32,000 to 34,000 cu. ft. of air per minute. The main current passes through the east entry to No. 2 slope. Slopes No. 1 and No. 5 both connect with No. 1 shaft. The accompanying map shows the relative position of the various entries.

The damage done to the mine was very slight, with the exception of one fall on the Main east entry, near the bottom of the shaft where the fire originated and burned out the timbers. This fall was about 80 feet in length, 12 feet wide and from 4 to 6 feet thick. This fall checked the fire and kept it from traveling, and smothered the flames to such an extent that the strong current of air did not carry the flames to the timbers further from the bottom of the shaft. One hundred and thirty-two men, of all classes, entered the mine between 7:30 and 8:00 A. M., on the morning of the fire.

After the workmen had been lowered into the mine, the top men sent down timbers consisting of props, ties and cross bars, after which they sent down the oil for the day's supply. The oil was sent down in

in tubs made by cutting a 50 gallon oil barrel in two. Hand holes were cut in them so that they can be readily handled. The tubs were not full, and would not contain more than 14 to 15 gallons each. The cager and a driver proceeded at once to lift the tubs off the cage, moving them back from 6 to 12 feet. After they had taken the oil from the cage the cager went to the west side of the shaft and called to the driver. The driver did not hear what the cager said and started to cross the shaft to the cager. In doing so he says he took his lamp off his head and walked past the tubs of oil with his lamp in his hand about 12 inches above the oil. A flash occurred which caused him to look around, and he saw one of the tubs was on fire with the flame circling around on top of the oil. He at once called to the cager to bring a bucket, and between then they put three or four buckets of water on the burning oil, but it did not have any effect. About this time, the mine foreman, came to where they were and at once took hold of the tub of oil and dumped it on the floor of the entry. No sooner was this done than the floor became a seething mass of flames, rising high enough to strike the timbers that were supporting the roof, and ignited them quickly.

The pump was started, and the cage was signalled. The foreman, cager and driver went to the surface. The fan was stopped about 20 minutes and then started again.

The foreman gave no explanation as to why he dumped the tub of oil, neither does he try to explain on what ground he stopped the fan. When the driver found he could not get down the shaft, he returned to the surface and went from there to the entrance of No. 1 escapeway, proceeding down that until he reached No. 6, ~~ik~~ or the Main entry, and found the smoke so strong he could not proceed further. On his way down he found a number of men making their escape from the mine, and on finding that he could not proceed further he came out of the mine. It was decided to seal up the mouth of No. 1 shaft

and try to reach the men through the other escapeways. Help was secured from the neighboring mines, and after sealing the shaft rescue parties proceeded down slope No. 1, and finally reached the shaft which was found to be uninjured.

They then came out and unsealed the shaft and used the cage to go out and in the mine. This work was quickly accomplished, and the men proceeded down the shaft, taking the hose with them, and after some delay got connection made and two strong streams of water were thrown on the fire. However, the fire being covered with slate, it was found rather difficult to extinguish the smoldering timbers that were below the fall. It was about 10:00 P. M., (14 hours after the fire originated) before it was sufficiently deadened so the mine could be explored.

After the fire had been smothered, the explorers proceeded into slope No. 2, about 12 feet below the main entry, or 212 feet from the bottom of the shaft, where the first body was found. Nineteen more bodies were found between this point and the seventh entry, or 240 feet below the first body. Eight more bodies were found between the seventh and eighth entries. The position of these bodies indicated that they had tried to force their way through the smoke, facing it until they fell. Thereturn airway was open, and it seems strange that the miners did not follow this exit and get away from the smoke and heat as fast as possible. As it turned out, the men actually rushed headlong into the greatest danger. The pipe line from the compressor was broken by the fall of roof, hence was of no use further down the slope. The bodies of all the men, save one, were recovered by 5:00 AM on the following day.

In summing up this matter, the lubricating oil should not have been taken into the iine in open tubs, although it was reasonable to think that this oil was noninflammable, and would not ignite or burn. When it

was found that the oil had ignited an attempt should have been made to smother the fire instead of dumping the tub of oil on the floor where it spread and burned fiercely. Had the fire been smothered, it is possible this disaster would have been obviated. Again, had the fan been reversed, causing the smoke to come up the hoisting shaft, the men might have been saved, although the shaft might have been damaged. It seems that the men became panic stricken and were unable to do anything that was right and proper. The miners working in No. 2 slope, ~~got into a~~ became panic stricken, and did everything but what they should have done, as many of them ought to have been saved. There was only one course for them to pursue when they saw the smoke coming, and that was to make their escape by the airway, or escapeway which had been provided for such contingencies.

LESSONS

1. Extreme care should be used in handling all inflammable material, such as lubricating and lamp oils, cotton waste, hay, straw, or any other material that will aid in feeding a fire after it is once under way.

2. Inflammable material should be transported in fire proof cases or casks, and then in the smallest quantity practicable. Such material should be stored in fire proof rooms, which are so placed that in case of fire, the passage way to the shaft or entry will not be cut off.

3. The fire described above emphasizes the value of fire drills at all mines, and the organization of a fire fighting team or teams.

Maps Not Scanned