



Ed Reinke/AP Photo

Pernell Witherspoon is congratulated after being rescued from within the Jellico Mine No 1. on Monday, June 20, 2011 in Middlesboro, Ky. Three mine maintenance workers were freed and appeared to be in good health Monday after being trapped for 14 hours in the flooded southeastern Kentucky mine.

Three miners in Kentucky freed after being trapped

MIDDLESBORO, Ky. (AP) — Three mine maintenance workers were freed and appeared to be in good health Monday after being trapped for 14 hours in a flooded southeastern Kentucky mine, a state spokesman said.

Dick Brown, spokesman for the state energy and environment cabinet, said the men were freed Monday at 8:22 p.m. EDT.

"All three miners are out. They're fine. Everybody is safe. No injuries," said C.K. Lane, chief operating officer with James River Coal, the Richmond, Va.-based company that owns the mine near Middlesboro. "We pumped the water down, and they were able to

walk through the water and walk on outside."

Relief was on the faces of Pernell Witherspoon's family, gathered Monday night at Middlesboro Appalachian Regional Healthcare Hospital.

"He's doing real good," said Witherspoon's brother, Nike Witherspoon. "He was perfect, everyone was perfect."

Elaine Smith, community and patient advocate at the hospital, said the three men were evaluated and released.

The three, identified as Witherspoon, Doug Warren and Russell Asher, had been on dry ground about 600 feet from the mine entrance since getting caught in the mine at 6:40 a.m., when officials said a collapse at

the entrance sent water from a swollen drainage ditch gushing in.

The men were nearing the end of their shift when it happened, said Eddie Starks, an MSHA official. Starks said the men used their helmet-mounted headlamps one at a time to conserve power.

Up to 50 rescue workers, including a state-trained mine rescue team, worked to free them, officials said.

Brown had told The Associated Press earlier in the day that water was being pumped out and that "we're just waiting for it to get low enough so they can wade out."

State and federal regulators issued a closure order for the

entire mine after the incident Monday in order to determine how much damage the water caused the mine and the equipment, Brown said. It may take several weeks to assess the damage and for the company to make repairs, he said.

Jellico Mine No. 1, operated by Bell County Coal and owned by Richmond, Va.-based James River Coal, is located in far southeastern Kentucky near the Tennessee and Virginia borders. The area was inundated with heavy rain Sunday night, with up to 6 inches dropped in five hours, the National Weather Service said.

In downtown Middlesboro, water-covered roadways were closed, splitting the city in half.