

Second woman killed in mine

WILLIAMSON, W.Va. (AP)— A young mother of two has become the second woman known to die in the nation's underground coal mines, as women miners take their place beside men and become part of the grim statistics of the job.

Eleanore Bowen, 25, of Williamson, was killed shortly before midnight Tuesday at the P.M. Charles Coal Co.'s No. 4 mine in nearby Rawl, officials said.

She was the first woman known to die in an underground coal mine in West Virginia, where more than 20,000 miners have been killed since man first began mining coal in the state. Seven other coal miners died on the job in West Virginia this year, and 35 coal miners died on the job in 1979.

Gerald Chafin, Mingo County's acting medical examiner, said Mrs. Bowen suffered a broken neck when she backed an underground tractor into a coal-cutting machine that was sitting idle.

He said her head was caught between the tractor and a continuous miner, a machine that resembles a huge electric razor.

Women, attracted by the relatively high wages, first began going underground as coal miners in 1973. Since then, several of the nation's estimated 3,000 female miners have suffered disabling injuries, and two have died.

The first woman to die was Marilyn McCusker, a former nurse's aide who won her mining job in a sex discrimination case. She was killed in a cave-in last October at a Rushton Coal Co. mine in Osceola Mills, Pa.

Chafin said Mrs. Bowen died a few minutes after she dropped off fellow miners and drove her tractor to another part of the small mine in the heart of the southern West Virginia coalfields.

Government inspectors, the mining company and the United Mine Workers union were investigating the accident.

Mrs. Bowen is survived by her husband, Donnie, and their two sons, Donnie Jr., 7, and Stephen, 3.

Betty Birchfield, manager of the Williamson office equipment company where Donnie Bowen is a typewriter repairman, said Mrs. Bowen worked at the Eastern Coal Co. mine in Stone, Ky. for about a year before being laid off.

"She was off work for about a year before getting this job," Mrs. Birchfield said. "I don't think her husband was too happy about her being in the mines, but, of course, everybody has to make a living."