



## Cuts Bring Question Of Commitment To Safety in Mines

By The New York Times  
WASHINGTON — The deaths of 24 coal miners in five days, including 13 killed Tuesday in Southeast Tennessee in what the authorities called an "apparent" explosion, has raised new questions about the government's commitment to enforcing mine safety.

The United Mine Workers union, mine-safety partisans and congressional overseers of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration charge that the Reagan administration's budget cuts are related to the nearly 8% increase in mine deaths so far this year.

**THE FATAL** explosion Tuesday at mine No. 21 of the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., was the second Appalachian mine accident in two days that apparently involved methane, an odorless explosive gas found in coal beds.

On Monday, eight miners died in an explosion at an Adkins Coal Co. mine at Topmost, Ky.

And last Thursday, three miners were crushed to death when a ceiling fell in a tunnel under Laurel Mountain at Berry, in north-central West Virginia.

**ROOF FALLS**, the sudden plunging of tons of slate on workers, are the most common cause of fatalities in the mines. But the five-day toll of 21 since Monday was attributed, at least in part, to sometimes conflicting official reports, to explosions of mine gas, a hazard regarded as more controllable by strict inspection. This focused attention on methane and on the last two fatal accidents.

Explosive mixtures of methane with air are normally prevented by rigidly regulated ventilation. The gas throughout a mine must be evacuated so that it does not reach the legal maximum level of 1%, which is the point where it would explode.

The two explosions were almost certain to bring a congressional investigation.

A **LETTER** demanding hearings was sent yesterday to Rep. Carl D. Perkins, an eastern Kentucky Democrat whose constituents died in the Adkins mine, by the Council of the Southern Mountains, a citizens' group. The letter said that "documents" of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration depicting how the agency intended to comply with budget cuts showed a proposed reduction of 150 jobs in coal mine safety enforcement, a 10% rollback.

As a result of the government hiring freeze imposed by Reagan in January, a mine safety agency spokesman, Kathy Snyder, said yesterday there already had been a reduction of 73 mine inspectors by retirement or resignation. The inspection force in District 7, which covers most of the South, has fallen from 133 to 122 in the last year.

"To reduce the inspectorate by

10% when fatal accidents are up 8% represents the kind of cold-blooded illogic that only David Stockman could endorse," the letter to Perkins said, referring to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. It was signed by J. David McArthur, the group's Washington lawyer.

**PERKINS**, a major sponsor of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, is chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor. He said he would not comment publicly on plans for such an investigation until after the Adkins miners' funerals this weekend.

But Rep. Joseph M. Gaydon, D-Pa., chairman of the Perkins committee's subcommittee on health and safety, said on the House floor yesterday that Reagan administration budget cuts already approved by Congress "may very well have hampered an agency that has shown itself, when fully funded, to be highly effective in the cause of mine safety."

The safety office of the United Mine Workers said that the death toll since Dec. 3 was 27 of which 21 were in sites. The coal industry death toll for the year stood at 143 yesterday, against 133 in all of 1980.

"**THEY AT** least have got to be embarrassed over there, but maybe that's all," said Danny Davidson, the union's assistant safety director, referring to the mine safety agency.

Spokesmen for the agency said that "there were reports" that the Tennessee miners had been tunneling near abandoned workings of Grundy mine 21 and had "broken through" a block of coal into a gas-filled passage, causing an explosion of methane.

A "breakthrough" can bring a sudden burst of methane or an asphyxiating "blackout" gas. The risk is so high that federal mine safety regulations require small tunnels to be drilled at least 10 feet ahead of advancing mining machinery. A spokesman here said that it had not been determined whether this safety procedure had been followed.

**GRUNDY MINE** 21 of the Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., a subsidiary of the Fluor Corp., an international contractor, has been cited for 91 infractions of the federal mine safety code since January 1979, a spokesman for the federal agency said. In the same period, the mine, or portions of it, were ordered temporarily closed three times because of "imminent danger" violations. The federal agency said the Adkins mine had 130 safety citations in the last three years and four closure orders.

Neither total is unusually high. The letter from the Council for the Southern Mountains, however, said that under the Reagan administration's policy of refusing federal regulations, the number of safety citations, orders and penalties in the industry "have all dropped." The letter said this was a trend that was "encouraging mine operators to believe that federal mine safety regulations are being eased and need not be respected."

## Tennessee Coal Firm Not Owned by Chevron Oil

Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co. now is owned by a joint venture of Royal Dutch Shell Petroleum and St. Joseph Minerals Corp., not Chevron Oil Co. as reported yesterday by The Tennessean.

Consolidated was purchased March 21, 1980, along with its parent company, the A.T. Massey Co. division of St. Joseph, when Shell bought a half-interest in that division and other St. Joseph Minerals coal properties. Massey is a Richmond, Va., coal company.

Shell now is drilling several test oil and gas wells on Consolidated Coal's 50,000-acre coal and timber reserves, but State Geologist Robert Hervey said yesterday that the nearest shell well is more than seven miles from any active mine and could not have been involved in the explosion Tuesday at Consolidated's No. 21 mine.

Paul Callis, board chairman of Consolidated, said yesterday that he has written letters to the governor of Tennessee, Tennessee's congressional delegation, and local legislators, saying that the company will issue no statements on the disaster to the media unless these are made jointly with the federal and state mine regulatory agencies.

**Curfew Clamped on Pinball, Video Game Parlors**

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — The city council has declared an anti-pinball parlor and video arcade ordinance for youngsters during school hours and after 10 p.m. on school nights.

The council gave final approval Tuesday to an ordinance banning youths from the businesses during the school day and after 10 p.m. on every night except Fridays and Saturdays. On those



— AP Losophoto

**Probe of Kentucky Mine Disaster Begins**  
TOPMOST, Ky. — State, federal, and local mining officials board a shuttle car to enter the Adkins Coal Co. number 18 mine near here to investigate the cause of a fatal explosion which killed eight miners.

## Mine Cited Earlier for Safety Violations

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were expected to be returned late last night or early today.

"The evidence is consistent with an explosion," he said, "but we don't know what kind or what caused it."

Either methane gas, which builds up in abandoned shafts such as the one the 11-man crew in section 003 were digging into two miles deep in the horizontal mine, or coal dust could have exploded, officials said.

**MCGRATH** said no explosives were sent with the men working in section 003. The crew's job was to open a hole into an abandoned shaft to create a "bleeder" that would improve ventilation.

"They didn't come across this 'inactive area by accident,'" he said. "They were trying to connect that area with an active producing area of the mine, to set up a bleeder to allow air to be returned to the working area more freely."

At 12:08 p.m. Tuesday, an explosion shook Dogwood Flats mountain and about 30 miners working in other areas instituted a practiced escape routine.

**FORCED** to crawl because the mine shafts are less than four feet high, they made their way to the surface. Rubber-wheeled, low-sliding buggies that carried them two to four miles back toward daylight and safety, a process that took about an hour.

When heads were counted, it was found that 13 men were still inside the mountain.

Company rescue teams, carrying specialized equipment and emergency breathing apparatus, made their way carefully into the mountain, uncertain whether a weakened roof might collapse at any moment or whether a second explosion would seal their fate as well.

**FAMILY** members of the missing miners were notified and were fed coffee and donuts in a lunchroom in a building about three miles from the mine.

The bodies were found about 5 1/2 hours after the search began. The crew's electrically operated cutting tools and drills had been turned off before the blast, the rescuers reported.

"We don't know what the crew was doing the moment of the blast or why the equipment was off, but we do know it was all shut down," McGrath said.

**THERE** was speculation in the community that Jimmy Wayne Rogers, of Jasper, mine superintendent, and Roy White Jr., 37, general mine foreman, whose bodies were found about 60 feet from the 11 crew members, might have been called to investigate a gas problem.

McGrath was sent to Tennessee after working two days at a

mine disaster at Topmost, Ky., where eight men were killed. In Kentucky, he told reporters the company involved there received an average of 1.2 violations per inspection.

**MSHA** inspectors found 30 violations during a full, quarterly inspection conducted in October and two additional violations were cited as the result of subsequent spot inspections, according to MSHA spokesman Kathy Snyder.

Snyder, contacted at the agency's headquarters in Arlington, Va., said the complete records of the mine were not available yesterday. She read from a computer listing of the 22 violations found in fiscal year 1982, which began Oct. 1, which showed:

● Four ventilation violations.  
● Three violations of rules concerning combustible materials and "rock dusting," the latter a process to reduce the amount of explosive coal dust in the air.  
● One mapping violation.  
● One lighting violation.

**EDDIE** French, a local miner and son of victim Ed French, said he had been concerned in the past by transformers inside the mine that, despite protective devices, can emit sparks.

"They're coated, of course, but they buzz all the time," he said. "I've seen sparks before, too."

**MINERS** AND other residents of the Sequatchie Valley, whose economy is greatly dependent on the mines, were in shock yesterday at the loss of the 13 lives, but most still said they believed the mines are safe.

In response to a question dur-

ing a press conference, referring to the three mine disasters in Appalachia in the past week that have claimed a total of 24 lives, McGrath said:

"Coal mining is one of the most dangerous jobs in the country." In addition to Rogers, French and White, the men killed in Tennessee's worst mining accident in 70 years were:

Jackie Tate, 38, of Whitwell; Harvey Nolan, 34, of Tracy City; Charlie Myers, 34, of Tracy City; Gaylor Parsons, 28, of Tracy City; Darrell Rollins, 28, of Whitwell; Lee Grimes, 23, of Laager; Frankie Wilburn, Laager; Jacob Kilgore, 39, of Whitwell; Larry Cooley, of Duglap; Danny Cooley, his brother, of Whitwell.

**Electrician Subbed for Miner**  
—And He Never Came Back

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**JOE** Kilgore, brother of victim J.B. Kilgore, "We're all grieving. We all cry in our own way." Relatives of White speculated he had "run" called to the shaft where the blast occurred to investigate a gas leak because, like French, that was his job.

"**HE WENT** where he was needed," said Dykes, a cousin. "They probably found gas and he came running, and then it happened."

**VISITORS** at Hooper's Funeral Home here began arriving at 4 p.m. yesterday. Within 30 minutes, they were having to park the cars in an adjacent field.

As fellow miners and male friends and relatives of the victims talked somberly of the risks they willingly take for the good pay offered in the mines, the widows of the miners and other women wept near the chapel.

**BUTCH** Holland, a Whitwell resident and one of the members of the Marion County Rescue Squad which entered the mine in search of the missing 13, said the miners who escaped the mountain when the blast shook the countryside were not aware of the gravity of the situation.

The blast was so powerful it blew out the headlights of trucks parked 100 feet from the mine entrance, but 30 other miners in another shaft of Grundy Mining Co.'s No. 21 mine, located about 30 miles northwest of Chattanooga, were uninjured.

"Some said their ears just popped in a daze yesterday after helped authorities find the wreckage of a car in which his father had been killed, the Missouri Highway Patrol said.

The boy, Jeremy Ketterman of Jefferson City, was found about 10 a.m. by a man who took him to the Jefferson City police station.

**THE BOY** told authorities he and his father had been in an auto accident Tuesday night.

He said he woke up at the bottom of an embankment yesterday and walked to the highway, authorities said.

"It's a terrible thing for the city, and it was worse being down there."

The No. 21 mine, operated by Jasper-based Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co., is one of 14 which honeycomb the ridge. Mining jobs are at a premium, and the work is considered by many employees to be safer than any other job.

"It's safer than driving a car," said Joe Kilgore. "I'll go to work tomorrow. That's how safe I know it."

**"THIS IS** just a fluke." Other miners said they will be back at work as soon as the mines, closed for the funerals, are reopened. The only exception will be No. 21, which will remain closed at least until the initial investigation is completed.

Miner Roger Oliver of Whitwell, who once worked in mine No. 21, said all of the mine equipment is electrically powered and has a safety device designed to shut it off when methane gas reaches a certain level.

**OLIVER** said the equipment used includes a cutting machine, a loading machine and a drill.

**THE MINE** is operated by Grundy Mining Co., a subsidiary of Tennessee Consolidated, which is partially owned by Shell Oil, not Chevron as was reported earlier.

**Boy Helps Police Find Wreck; Father Dead**

ASHLAND, Mo. (AP) — A 4-year-old boy found wandering along a poplar in a daze yesterday later helped authorities find the wreckage of a car in which his father had been killed, the Missouri Highway Patrol said.

The patrol later found the wreckage of the car and the body of David Ketterman, 27, near the spot where the boy was found, along U.S. 63 about four miles south of Ashland in Boone County.

**THE CAR** had gone down an embankment and was hidden by brush, authorities said. Police took the boy to Charles Still in Jefferson City, where he was treated for a cut on his head and was listed in good condition last night.

The patrol said Ketterman's car apparently had gone out of control, ran off the road and overturned several times, throwing Ketterman and his son from the car.

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