

REORGANIZATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MINES

In compliance with the wishes of Governor Fisher, as expressed in his inaugural address, the Department of Mines was reorganized in order to give the mining industry the best service possible. The reorganization took effect July 1, 1927. A head of the Department, designated as the Secretary of Mines, was named and two additional Deputies were appointed to have charge, respectively, of the Anthracite and Bituminous Divisions, which heretofore had functioned directly under the Secretary of Mines. Four electrical inspectors were temporarily engaged, one of whom was retained permanently, whose duties were to examine in detail all enclosed electrical machinery in use in the gaseous mines and report the condition to the District Mine Inspectors.

Contact was made by the Secretary of Mines with National bodies interested in questions of freight rate regulations, mining legislation, mechanization of mines, Mine Rescue and Safety work, and education of those engaged in the mining industry. Close relations were established between the operating end of the industry and the Department of Mines with the object of reducing the accident toll and simplifying and standardizing the reports submitted by the operators to the Department.

MINE CATASTROPHES

WOODWARD COLLIERY CAVE-IN AND EXPLOSION

“Catastrophe” is the term applied to an accident in which five or more lives are lost. An accident of this kind occurred May 26, 1927, at the Woodward Colliery of the Glen Alden Coal Company, Edwardsville, Luzerne County, Pa., when a cave-in and explosion of gas caused the loss of seven lives. The report of the Inspector who investigated the accident is given below:

“Nine miners were at work cutting and loading coal on 9 west counter when the explosion occurred and the cave-in took place. In about fifteen minutes after the cave-in, a very severe concussion took place due to an explosion of gas.

After all the persons had been removed from the mine, the company mustered the officials from the other collieries of the company. Several of the mine inspectors who had heard of the accident reported to the mine and with the colliery workmen, descended the shaft to the Baltimore vein. We discovered stoppings, doors and one air bridge had been destroyed by the explosion. On the main haulage road considerable debris had been scattered about, trolley lines were down, stringers and props were lying about, many of them scorched. Two small fires were started by the explosion, but were easily extinguished. An effort was made to go in 10 west return which is only a short distance from 9 west counter where the three miners were working. The current in 10 west return was found to be highly explosive. An effort was made to reach 9 west counter from 9 west gangway. We found the passageways filled with coal and evidence of the squeeze still continuing. There was slight evidence of afterdamp; no smoke could be detected in the air. The fan was not affected by the explosion and was working at its normal speed. In the afternoon efforts were made to restore ventilation and the night was spent in cleaning and propping the principal

haulage road from No. 3 shaft to 8 west gangway. The men who had worked during the night reached the surface Friday at 5:40 A. M. At 6:00 A. M. an explosion occurred which destroyed the concrete fan drift on the surface. Fortunately there were no persons in the mine when this explosion took place. We believe the explosion occurred in the Baltimore vein; however, some are of the opinion that it occurred in the Hillman vein. It was then decided to build seals in the mine and to cover the shaft with a temporary seal. The shaft seal was completed at 2:00 A. M., May 28. On Sunday, May 29, at 1:35 A. M., a terrific explosion occurred which destroyed the shaft seal, lifting the steel tower from its foundation and in a leaning position clear of the shaft. The buildings connected with No. 3 shaft were more or less damaged, as well as the shaft concrete casing.

On May 31, the officials of the Glen Alden Coal Company with the State Mine Inspectors held a consultation at No. 3 shaft and decided to continue sealing, to isolate the workings of No. 1 Baltimore shaft and No. 1 Red Ash shaft from No. 3 shaft. These shafts are connected in several veins over a large territory. Three shifts with a large force of workmen are still engaged in building seals. Work on the returns is done with helmets. Carbon monoxide gas testers are carried on each shift.

On June 5, No. 3 shaft was again temporarily sealed. The seal has been strengthened gradually and has been completed for some time. The pressure is now up the shaft equal to 1.5 W.G.

Everything is being done to place the mine in condition to extinguish the fire which has been causing the explosions. The shaft casing which was cracked in many places allowed the gas to escape to the atmosphere. The rock filling around the shaft is being removed by a compressed air shovel and when a fracture is discovered in the shaft casing, a wood fibre quick plaster is used, which gives very good results.

No explosions have occurred since the explosion of May 29. The mine is now gradually filling with gas which is sufficiently high so that it does not support combustion. The carbon monoxide per cent still keeps high, but shows signs of gradually becoming less.

In conclusion it is my opinion that the squeeze occurred in Old 8 west gangway and finally extended to 9 west. The officials of the mine believe that the trouble was caused by the top coal or top Baltimore vein."

Owing to the conditions existing at this mine and the possibility that all danger had not been passed, the inspector was directed to make weekly inspections and report promptly to the Department. Five bodies of the victims of this disaster still remain in the mine notwithstanding the fact that the work of recovery has been carried on as continuously as possible under rather dangerous conditions ever since the accident occurred.

It is believed now that the last of the falls will soon be cleared away and such repairs made as will enable the officials of the mine to recover the bodies that have been entombed since May 26, 1927.

EXPLOSION OF GAS AT BALTIMORE NO. 5 COLLIERY HUDSON COAL COMPANY

Another catastrophe with very serious results occurred May 25, 1928, when an explosion of gas took place in the Red Ash vein of the Conyng-