

Mining Magazine



Explosives and blasting

A round-up of the latest technologies and services globally, from storage and transport, to detonation, fragmentation and modelling

Haul road management

Industry experts outline best practice in design, construction and maintenance at surface operations

Flotation

Key vendors discuss their current R&D focuses and new equipment installations

Mine of the month

Coeur Mining details its plans for the Rochester gold-silver mine in Nevada



Safety first

There has been a lot of media coverage in the past few weeks about the US government shutdown, which lasted from October 1 to 17. As a result of the shutdown, approximately 800,000 federal staff throughout the country were furloughed (put on temporary unpaid leave). Services such as national parks, national monuments, weather information and even scientific research were put on hold.

However, a serious concern that may be linked to the shutdown is mine safety. During the 16 days of shutdown, four miners died at US coal mines – three of them over the course of three days. Before this, the US coal mining industry had not had three consecutive days of fatal accidents for 11 years.

Roger King, a longwall maintenance foreman, died at CONSOL Energy's McElroy mine in West Virginia on October 4 when he was hit by a chain being used during a machine move.

On the following day, a motorised golf cart used for underground transportation at White County Coal's Pattiki mine in Illinois rolled over and pinned its driver, Robert Smith, underneath.

Chris Stassinos, a dozer operator, was killed at PacifiCorp and Idaho Power's Bridger mine in Wyoming on October 6, when his dozer went over a 46m highwall.

Then, on October 11, Larry Schwartz, a miner at Five Star Mining's Prosperity mine in Indiana, died after being pinned between a shuttle car and the coal rib.

The US government's mine safety branch, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), had to furlough nearly 1,400 people – that's 60% of its 2,355 staff – during the government shutdown. As a result, it was forced to suspend its regular mine inspections and limit itself to targeted inspections of high-hazard mines. The United Mine Workers of America (UMW) union had expressed concern about the possible safety impacts of the shutdown, particularly at non-union mining operations, several days before the first of these deaths.

On October 7, MSHA released a statement that urged the mining industry to step up its compliance with safety and health regulations, and reminded mine operators that they have the primary responsibility of protecting miners from safety and health hazards.

Joseph Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health, and head of MSHA, commented: "Three miners killed on three consecutive days is extremely troubling. The fact that this occurred over the weekend, when there may be a greater expectation that an MSHA inspector would not be present, is a red flag."

These incidents underline the importance of safety in mines, which can still be hazardous environments despite huge technological advances in recent years. They should also serve as a reminder that each miner is responsible for his or her own safety, as well as that of their colleagues. While the mining industry is generally safer now than in previous decades, accidents do still occur and even small safety breaches can add up quickly.

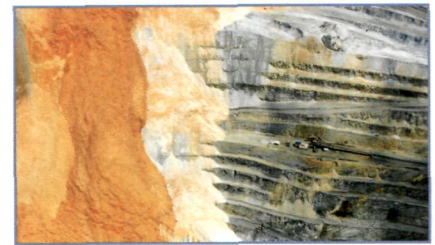
Sir Brian Appleton, one of the assessors of the inquiry that followed the Piper Alpha oil-rig disaster in the North Sea in 1988, perhaps put it best when he said: "Safety is not an intellectual exercise to keep us in work. It is a matter of life and death. It is the sum of our contributions to safety management that determines whether the people we work with live or die".

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Next month

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- Conveyors
- Mine design, planning & closure
- Buyer's guide

COVER

At Coeur Rochester in Lovelock, Nevada, US, the Stage III Phase I heap-leach pad is being constructed as part of the expansion of mining at the site. Crews are completing the liner installation, and placement of the first ore to the pad has begun. Much of the ore to be placed is being mined from material stockpiled at the site during mining conducted between 1986 and 2007.

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