Objective

Researchers with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have developed a training module to educate both new, inexperienced miners as well as veterans on important issues related to self-rescue and escape procedures. These include: (1) physical and environmental conditions that can be encountered in a mine after a major explosion, (2) knowledge of emergency meeting locations and escape routes, (3) the importance of using self-rescuers, even in seemingly clear air, to keep the lungs isolated from contaminants, and (4) why miners should not go off to look for others who are missing. In addition, the module may stimulate miners to think about and discuss mine explosions and the devastating effects of such an event.

Background

On November 20, 1968, a massive explosion rocked the underground workings of Mountaineer Coal Co.’s Farmington No. 9 Mine in West Virginia (Figure 1). Of the 99 miners who were working in the mine at the time of the explosion, only 21 survived and escaped the mine. This group included eight miners who were rescued from the Mahan’s Run air shaft. Nearly 40 years after the event, researchers from the NIOSH Pittsburgh Research Laboratory conducted oral history interviews with two of the eight survivors rescued from the shaft.

During their interviews, Waitman “Bud” Hillberry and Gary Martin discuss the Farmington Mine disaster, including the workplace climate leading up to the explosion, and give detailed accounts of their escape from the mine’s 7 South section and rescue from the Mahan’s Run air shaft after the explosion. During their discussions, Hillberry and Martin describe:

(1) Events and conditions leading up to the explosion, such as ventilation stoppings lagging far behind the faces of 7 South section
(2) The explosion event and their initial response to it
(3) The devastation caused by the initial explosion
(4) The possible problems that could occur by going back to look for missing miners
(5) Problems that can occur when miners remove their self-rescuers, even in seemingly clear air
(6) Knowing how to properly use self-rescue equipment
(7) Starting the fans prematurely
(8) Decisions and actions that played a role in the explosion and subsequent rescue efforts

Figure 1.—Smoke pouring from the Llewellyn Shaft after the explosion at Farmington Mine.
Until 2006, training to prepare miners to escape an underground mine explosion was largely informal and not detailed. At most, trainers reviewed emergency escape procedures and discussed emergency response. In addition, miners may have walked the escapeways from their respective work stations.

In 2006, several fatal incidents occurred at U.S. underground coal mines. These included an explosion at the Wolf Run Mining Co.'s Sago Mine in West Virginia, in which 12 miners perished; a mine fire at the Aracoma Coal Co.'s Alma No. 1 Mine in West Virginia, in which 2 miners died; and an explosion at the Kentucky Darby Coal Co.'s Darby No. 1 Mine, in which 5 miners died. These incidents raised a number of issues related to mine escape and self-rescue following catastrophic events. As a result, new regulations were promulgated requiring mines to provide quarterly mine escape and evacuation training to their workforces.

**Results and Accomplishments**

A 25-minute videotape and instructor’s guide for use in safety training or other settings were developed. The target audience consists of all underground mine workers, regardless of commodity. This training video will help safety instructors better prepare both new, inexperienced miners as well as veterans for the situations they could encounter should they have to escape an underground mine following an explosion. This “expectations” training will help miners to better respond should an explosion occur. The training module will also provide a powerful reminder to all miners that it is critical to make safety an everyday practice.

**For More Information**

For more information on the Farmington training module, contact Michael J. Brnich, Jr., CMSP, (412-386-6840, MBrnich@cdc.gov) or Charles Vaught, Ph.D. (412-386-6830, CVaught@cdc.gov), NIOSH Pittsburgh Research Laboratory, P.O. Box 18070, Pittsburgh, PA 15236-0070. You may also e-mail inquiries to: pithealth@cdc.gov.

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