

ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY NOVEMBER 30



On November 30, 1968, the Consolidated Coal Company's Number 9 Mine was sealed, ten days after an explosion that resulted in the deaths of 78 miners.

CSO: SS.8.9, SS.8.25, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (Ms89-41)

1. What led to the decision to ultimately seal the Consolidated Coal Company's Number 9 Mine?
2. What were the possible causes of the explosion?
3. Were there any escapeways?
4. Did the national media attempt to manipulate the coverage of the disaster by untruthful storylines?
5. How much were the widows of the fallen miners given per month?
6. According to Appendix C, how many miners lost their lives in 1968?

Think Critically: How has mine safety changed in the past fifty years? Did the Farmington Mine Disaster force more federal oversight into mine safety? How did the town of Farmington deal with this major disaster?

MINE DISASTERS

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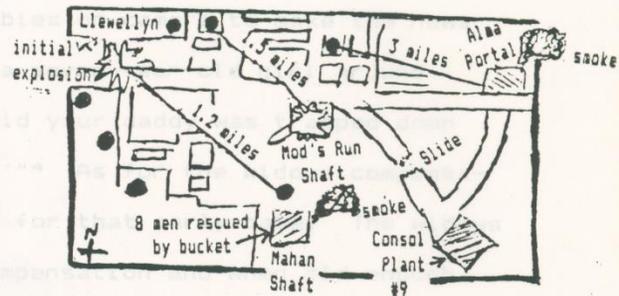
(History, Operations and Prevention)

including

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By November 29, at least 24 additional explosions and fires had occurred. These conditions along with dangerous levels of toxic gases, lead to the decision to seal the mine. The Mod's Run shaft was sealed with 26 tons of steel and concrete. Minutes after placement an explosion blew out this seal. Later attempts at sealing the mine shaft were more successful.¹ While the actual cause of the explosions were never pinpointed, several possible causes were suggested including: high methane levels, violations of mine safety regulations or an explosion caused by faulty electrical equipment.²



Times-WV artist rendering Nov. 20, 1988. Lifestyles
The large black dots indicate the approximate
location of section crews at the time of the blast.

Sara Kaznoski, widow of a miner killed in the blast thought, "It was too much gas that caused it," (the explosion) "but the company has never admitted it. There was so many strange things that happened about the tragedy. There'd been a fire in the mines earlier in the week." (One week after the state mine inspection). "The air fan wasn't working, you know. It had broken down. They never said so, but the fan wasn't working and there were very few escape-ways in those days. They have to have escape-ways now, but there weren't any then...and the men were just trapped." As of this date, her husband's body has not been recovered from the Farmington mine.³

Some interesting information discovered about this disaster was the cruel treatment of families by the press, and the widows lack of financial compensation. Oce Smith, columnist for the Times-West Virginian, reports, "I have never been so ashamed of the media as I was then. The national media descended on the scene and they were the worst, rudest, nastiest, most obsequious people I have ever known. Two or three pregnant ladies were offered \$100.00 to have their babies on camera to make the news more touching and they followed a seven-year-old girl around saying 'Did you cry when they said your daddy was trapped down there? Did you cry? Answer me!'"⁴ As for the widows compensation, it was extremely low, even for that early date. The widows received \$90.00 a month state compensation and when old enough for social security, they became eligible for additional benefits. The UMWA at that date did not furnish the widows a pension.⁵

Nineteen bodies remain sealed in the mine today, with the cause of the explosion still unknown. The final sealing of the mine prevented a complete investigation and official report. In the immediate or near future a federal report on the Farmington disaster will be released, according to Robert Elam, an engineer with MSHA's Coal Mine Safety and Health section.

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Appendix B

TIME LINE

HOW THE FEDERAL MINE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT CAME ABOUT

1907: Monongah, WV
Explosion kills 358

1908: Jacobs Creek, PA
Explosion kills 239

1909: Marianna, PA
Explosion kills 154

1910: Public Law 61-179
First federal action; Bureau
of Mines created, but lacks
power of enforcement

1940: Bartley, WV
Explosion kills 41

1940: Neff, Ohio
Explosion kills 72

1940: Portage, PA
Explosion kills 63

1941: Public Law 77-49
Bureau of Mines inspectors
given power to accompany
state inspectors in mines

1947: Centralia, IL
Explosion kills 111

1951: West Frankfort, IL
Explosion kills 119

1952: Public Law 82-522
Bureau of Mines given limited
power to issue notices of
violations

1961: Public Law 89-376
Federal Metal/Non-Metal Act
A two page law authorizing a
study of safety problems

1965: Tennessee
Explosion kills 14

1966: Public Law 89-577
Federal Metal and Non-Metallic
Mine Safety Act of 1966
Federal inspectors had limited
inspection/notice authority

1968: Farmington, WV
Explosion kills 78

1969: Public Law 91-173
Federal Coal Mine Health and
Safety Act of 1969
Strict enforcement with mandatory
fines and possible criminal
penalties

1972: Kellogg, Idaho
Fire kills 91

1976: Scotia, KY
Explosion kills 26

1977: Public Law 95-164
Federal Mine Safety and Health
Act of 1977
Enforcement agency moved to Dept.
of Labor, renamed Mine Safety and
Health Administration (MSHA)

Appendix C

COAL MINING FATALITIES IN 1988

Mine Safety and Health Administration
Office of Information and Public Affairs

Preliminary data

<u>By accident classification</u>		<u>By state</u>	
Haulage.....	18	Kentucky.....	14
Machinery.....	13	West Virginia...	13
Fall of roof.....	8	Virginia.....	5
Electrical.....	2	Pennsylvania....	4
Explosives.....	2	Ohio.....	3
Exploding vessel		Utah.....	3
under pressure..	2	Tennessee.....	2
Fall of highwall..	2	Alabama.....	1
Fall of person....	2	Arizona.....	1
Inundation.....	1	Colorado.....	1
Other.....	2	Illinois.....	1
Total.....	52	Indiana.....	1
		Oklahoma.....	1
		Texas.....	1
		Wyoming.....	1
		Total.....	52
<u>By location</u>			
Underground.....	25		
Surface at UG mine..	4		
Surface mine.....	12		
Preparation plant..	10		
Other facilities...	1		
Total.....	52		
<u>Past years for comparison</u>			
1888 (100 years ago).....	728		
1907 (worst in history)....	3,242		
1938 (50 years ago).....	1,105		
1968 (20 years ago).....	311		
1978.....	106*	1982.....	122
1979.....	144	1983.....	70*
1980.....	133	1984.....	125
1981.....	153	1985.....	68*
		1986.....	89
		1987.....	63*
		1988.....	52*

*Represented a new historic low record since at least 1869. (Records of coal mining fatalities for the 1800's are fragmentary, but at least partial counts have been compiled for each year starting with 1869; in that year, 179 coal mining deaths were recorded.)