

News Release



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Contact: Amy Louviere
Phone: 202-693-9423

Underground fire traps 3 miners at Missouri lead-zinc operation *Miners retreat to refuge chamber, successfully rescued by mine rescue teams*

ARLINGTON, Va. – A truck fire that broke out Jan. 21 at Doe Run Co.’s Viburnum #29 lead-zinc mine in Bunker, Mo., trapped three miners when their escape route became blocked by the 30-ton haulage vehicle. The blaze, which erupted around 10:30 a.m. CST, prompted an immediate evacuation of the mine. When mining officials discovered that three of the 16 working underground remained unaccounted for and uncommunicative, they activated the company’s two mine rescue teams. Officials from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) arrived on the scene around noon, followed by a third rescue team from St. Genevieve, Mo.-based Mississippi Lime Co.

While rescue activities were underway, the three miners traveled 2,400 feet on their mining equipment to a designated refuge chamber – stocked with water and compressed air – where they waited safely inside. Meanwhile, six members of Doe Run’s mine rescue team entered the mine from the surface through a 60-inch-diameter, 580-foot-deep ventilation shaft. A portable, truck-mounted 36-inch-diameter rescue cage was used to lower the team members into the mine.

The team advanced approximately 1,400 feet, and, around 3:50 p.m., located the miners in the refuge chamber. With the aid of a rescue escape hoist, the miners arrived at the surface between 4 and 5 p.m., and were transported by ambulance to Washington County Hospital in Potosi, Mo., for observation. They were treated and released that evening.

The last of the mine rescue team members reached the surface at 5:30 p.m. MSHA has launched a full investigation into the mine fire.

“I am deeply relieved at the successful rescue of the three miners involved in last Thursday’s accident,” said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. “Furthermore, I could not be more proud of the efforts of the mine rescue teams, mining officials and MSHA. The successful outcome is a testament to the dedication, hard work and constant preparation of these individuals. My warmest thoughts and prayers go out to the families of these miners.”

“This outcome was exactly what we strive for in any mine emergency,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “It also reaffirms the value of these three components of a successful rescue: Every mine should have a proper emergency response plan in place, mine rescue teams should be available at a moment’s notice and the installation of refuge chambers can substantially increase a miner’s chance for survival.”

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