

Eye on World & Local

Twenty-Nine West Virginia Miners Perish

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Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch coal mine was rocked by a deadly blast on Monday, April 5th. The blast killed twenty-nine miners, making it the worst mining disaster since 1970. Seven bodies were immediately recovered at the site. Twenty-five men were known to have perished, two survived, and four miners were unaccounted for. Rescuers attempted to enter the mine, only to be driven back by lethal gasses. This resulted in an agonizing weeklong wait for relatives and officials who held onto faint hopes that the miners had somehow survived. According to the Washington Post, the discovery of the last four bodies dashed any hopes for survivors. "We did not receive the miracle that we prayed for," West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin said after meeting with relatives to deliver the news. "So this journey has ended and now the healing will start."

Federal investigators from the Mine Safety and Health Administration arrived at the Upper Big Branch mine last Monday, exactly one week after the fatal blast. The mine's owner, Richmond, Va.-based Massey Energy Co., has been under scrutiny for a string of safety violations at the mine. CEO Don Blankenship has defended the company's record and denies accusations that he puts profits ahead of safety. Authorities have said high methane levels may have led to the disaster. According to the Associated Press, Massey has been repeatedly cited and fined for problems with the system that vents methane. He has also been fined for allowing combustible dust to build up. In a statement, President Obama called for a thorough investigation and said that, in memory of those that died the country should "demand accountability." Congress will convene hearings later this month to look at weaknesses in federal mine safety legislation.

Twenty-eight of the dead were Massey employees, and one was a contract worker, a company spokesman said. A complete list of victims was not released, though several were known through obituaries and information families released. Massey CEO Don Blankenship issued this statement: "I

want to thank the rescue teams from Massey Energy, teams from other coal companies and all others who worked tirelessly and selflessly for more than a week to recover the miners at the Upper Big Branch mine. Coal miners are an extended family, and the dedication of our miners and miners from competitor companies who put their own lives at risk in the search and recovery effort is commendable."

President Obama delivers the eulogy for the West Virginia miners. Photo courtesy of USA Today.



Crisis for SEPTA: Man Dies on Bus

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Septa buses. Photo courtesy of NBC Philadelphia.

When we hear about the poor man that died while riding on the SEPTA bus, we hear about how this is not an uncommon occurrence. Consider that for a second. When did it become the norm to have someone die on a public transportation system? According to the transit authority, "it is not uncommon for a person to pass away on a SEPTA bus," but in this particular situation it was the way this man's death was handled that got people talking. It was Sunday morning around 4:00 a.m., when a man stumbled onto the SEPTA bus seemingly unresponsive.

The protocol SEPTA bus drivers are expected to carry out if any emergency were to occur seems to be to call dispatcher and report what appears to be wrong. If the situation seems dire, the dispatcher will send out help and request the driver stop their route; however, in Leonard Sedden's case, the SEPTA bus driver, Nakita Manfra, called in this man's unresponsive state of being and asked what course of action should be taken. Dispatcher told Manfra to continue her route and continue to let passengers on board and when she arrived at one of her last stops help would be there (keep in mind that this spot where help would arrive was about an hour away from the time she called in the emergency). When confronted about the way they handled the situation, the dispatcher said Manfra did not make Sedden's state to be any type of dire emergency.

The conversation between Manfra and the SEPTA supervisor states Manfra describing Sedden's state and dispatcher saying do not delay service and the supervisor will board at a later stop. Reporters say that it took SEPTA supervisor more than 30 minutes to arrive at the anticipated stop along the route. It was in this time that Leonard Sedden passed away police believe—when relaying the news to SEPTA supervisor; they seemed shocked at the news of his death. Judging from the recordings released shortly after his death, any type of concern with unresponsiveness would call for immediate medical attention.

SEPTA is blaming Nakita Manfra for not specifying she needed medical assistance. Manfra and the Transit Workers Union are blaming SEPTA for not taking responsibility and helping to prevent the worsening of this situation.

Richard Maloney, SEPTA spokesperson, stated "if [Manfra] would have requested an ambulance, if she would have requested police, they would have been immediately dispatched." On the other side, Willie Brown, Transit Workers Union Local 234 president said, "supervisors should have sent someone right away."

Because people are deeply disturbed by the death of Sedden as well as the way SEPTA handled his situation, SEPTA will be re-evaluating their policies. Along with their revision of policy, SEPTA will also have to deal with the grievance that will be filed against them from the Transit Workers Union.

After this traumatic event, SEPTA should have hopefully learned from their flawed system and make some revisions. When there is a passenger in distress, of any kind, the immediate reaction should be to stop the route and continue on to get medical help to that passenger. Only time will tell how SEPTA handles this situation, but I am sure we will continue to hear about this man's tragic death on the news.