

Worker Dies Of Head Injury At W.Va. Coal Mine

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The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) -- An unidentified worker died of a head injury Friday at CONSOL Energy's McElroy mine in Marshall County, and the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training said it was investigating.

The accident happened just before 1 p.m., but it was not immediately clear how the worker was injured. The miner died on the way to the hospital.

Spokeswoman Leslie Fitzwater couldn't immediately offer more details.

Lynn Seay, a spokeswoman for Pennsylvania-based CONSOL, said the company is working closely with state and federal investigators to determine the cause. McElroy operations have temporarily shut down and will resume at 4 p.m. Saturday, she said.

The McElroy mine is a huge longwall operation in West Virginia's Northern Panhandle that the company's website says produced 9.4 million tons of steam coal last year.

The fatality is the sixth in West Virginia so far this year.

Before Friday, federal Mine Safety and Health Administration records show that 14 workers had died at U.S. coal mines so far this year, and five of them were in West Virginia.

Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin called it "a terrible tragedy."

In February, Tomblin asked the state's coal companies to take a time-out for safety talks after four mine workers died in two weeks. A total of 85 state safety instructors, inspectors, supervisors, mine-rescue coordinators and administrators visited some 500 operations, including surface mines and preparation plants.

Stand-downs are not uncommon in West Virginia: In April 2010, after an explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine killed 29 men, former Gov. Joe Manchin issued an executive order calling for a similar timeout. He also urged one in 2006, after another string of fatal accidents.

MSHA, which has furloughed more than half its employees because of the continuing government shutdown, didn't immediately issue any statements about the fatality.

West Virginia led the nation in coal mining fatalities last year, accounting for seven of the 20 miners killed on the job.

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MSHA said that's down from 21 in 2011.

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