Massey Offers $3 Million to Families of Killed Coal Miners

TIM HUBER, AP Business Writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Massey Energy Co. is offering $3 million to each of the families of 29 men killed in an explosion at its Upper Big Branch coal mine in West Virginia, the daughter of one of the victims said Thursday.

The offer came a week earlier when Massey officials visited the family, said Michelle McKinney, daughter of Benny Ray Willingham. McKinney said other families have received the same offer.

Massey did not immediately respond to calls seeking comment.

The widow of William Griffith has already filed a wrongful death lawsuit, while the mother of Adam Morgan has won a court order preserving relevant records and potential evidence from the disaster. The April 5 explosion — the nation's worst coal mining disaster in 40 years — also has prompted legal action by several current and former shareholders.

McKinney isn't interested in settling.

"Nope," she said. "My dad didn't have a price tag on him. Don Blankenship don't have enough money to pay me."

Massey CEO Blankenship is among the highest paid executives in the coal industry. McKinney said she would like to take every penny he has.

"Maybe it'll save somebody else's life," she said.

On Monday, Richmond, Va.-based Massey laid out a financial package that it said would free the families from ever worrying about money.

Among other things, Massey said families would receive five times the miner's annual pay as life insurance benefits and an additional payment to surviving spouses. The offer also would include health coverage both for surviving spouses and dependent children, and four years' worth of college or vocational education at any accredited school in West Virginia for those children.

Director Robert Foglesong said accepting those benefits would not prevent a family from pursuing any legal claims.

Federal and state investigators suspect the explosion was caused by a combination of methane gas and combustible coal dust. Toxic gases have kept them from entering the mine. Officials say tests showing the presence of acetylene and

ethylene, gases not normally found in an underground work environment, suggest a fire may be burning somewhere.

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