

Human remains found at bottom of Nevada mine shaft

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Rescuers found human remains at the bottom of a gold mine shaft in Nevada where two miners were trapped more than a day ago, authorities said Saturday.

Elko County Sheriff Dale Lotspeich said that while he can't make a positive identification of the remains, they are believed to be those of the two missing miners.

Lotspeich said it will take from three weeks to two months to identify the remains.

Barrick Gold of North America spokesman Lou Schack says searchers worked for more than 32 hours to safely access the area Friday at the Meikle mine, about 1,300 feet (400 meters) below the surface.

The men were being lowered into a shaft in a cage early Thursday morning when a vertical pipe broke loose from a wall and struck the cage, severely damaging it.

The vertical pipe, about 2 feet (60 centimeters) in diameter, runs the entire length of the shaft and is used to carry crushed stone and rocks, said Lou Schack of Barrick Gold of North America.

There were about 160 employees in the mine at the time of the accident. Family members of the missing miners were notified soon after the accident.

Schack confirmed five fatalities have occurred at the mine, which opened in 1996 about 55 miles (90 kilometers) northwest of Elko and 275 miles (440 kilometers) northeast of Reno. There have been 26 mining deaths over the last decade in Nevada, the world's fourth largest gold producer behind South Africa, Australia and China.

"When the pipe failed everything falls so we have to remove debris to make sure we can get in safely," Schack said.

The men were being lowered in the cage to inspect the pipe when the accident occurred, according to the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Toronto-based Barrick, the largest gold company in the world, owns several mines in Nevada.

The Meikle mine, which has about 300 workers, is operated by its subsidiary Barrick Goldstrike Mines. Its underground operations have been closed since the accident.

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