Coal Mine Gas Blast Kills 29 Workers

the Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A gas explosion at a coal mine in central China has killed 29 workers, Chinese authorities said Sunday.

Six other miners survived Saturday evening's blast at a state-owned coal mine in Hengyang city in Hunan province, China's State Administration of Work Safety said in a statement on its website.

Five of the workers were rescued, while one climbed out of an air shaft of the Xialiuchong Coal Mine, the statement said.

The work safety administration said rescue work was complete as no other miners were working at the time of the explosion.

Song Yuanming, the chief of the provincial coal mine safety bureau, told state broadcaster CCTV that there was a large outburst of gas in the mine 250 meters (820 feet) underground that was ignited by sparks produced by machines.

CCTV said that the mine's operating license had been revoked in the first half of this year because it did not adopt measures to pump out dangerous gases from underground, but that the mine continued production without permission.

China's coal mines are the most dangerous in the world. Demand for coal induces many producers to sidestep safety regulations, although conditions have improved and a number of small, illegal mines have been shut. Annual fatalities are now about one-third of the high of nearly 7,000 in 2002.

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