

# Pike river mining disaster



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On the 19th of September 2010, what was to become known as the Pike River Mining Disaster began in the close proximity to the town of Greymouth. At an occupied mine of 31 miners and contractors, an initial explosion occurred in the West Coast Region of New Zealand's South Island at approximately 3: 44pm. Two were fortunate enough to walk away from the scene and were treated for moderate injuries at hospital, then later released the next day.

It was believed that the remaining 16 miners and 13 contractors were 1500m from the entrance of the mine. A second large explosion occurred on November 24th and all hope was lost that anybody remained alive. “ Based on the expert evidence that I've been given and the men who were present, based on the rescue teams that were with me, it is our belief that no-one has survived. And everyone will have perished”, said Superintendent Gary Knowles, the man in charge of the attempted rescue mission.

Two more explosions occurred in the mine on the 26th and the 28th of November, distinguishing any hope that may have remained for the people trapped. The Rescue Operation was led by the New Zealand Police and they were assisted by what was known as “ Operation Pike” consisting of staff and management from Pike River Coal Ltd., experts in the field of Mine Rescue from both New Zealand and Australia, the Red Cross, The New Zealand Defence Force, and fire & ambulance services.

In the Red Cross Hall in Greymouth, a welfare service was initiated for the families of the trapped men. This was because the mine's access road was closed off to everyone except for the emergency services. For several days there was a delay in rescue services entering the mine. Anger amongst the

locals began because of what they considered to be undue cautiousness. The leader of Mines Rescue, Trevor Watts, explained that their caution was caused by the team's belief that any rescuers who entered may have been injured or killed given the conditions of the mine. The 29 men killed by the explosions ranged from the ages of 17 to 62. 24 of the men were New Zealanders, 2 Scottish, 2 Australians, & 1 South African.

The cause of what triggered the explosions still remains uncertain and the Royal Commission of Inquiry is expected to reveal its findings by March 2012. Because it is a matter of very significant public interest, the Royal Commission is taking charge, the highest status of inquiry in New Zealand. The bodies of the men remain trapped in the mine and the recovery effort was abandoned in January 2011 as it was deemed unsafe.

Pike River Mining Disaster – Nature of the Change The Pike River Mining Disaster wasn't predicted and therefore led to unplanned changes in the Greymouth community and Pike River Mine Ltd. The Pike River Mine stopped operating during the explosions and in the aftermath due to the enquiry taking place. Solid Energy, Kiwi Rail, the Port of Lyttelton and a shipping company, all involved in the transportation of the mine's coal were impacted by the disaster, lacking business from the mine. Pike River Mine stopped operating, halting the extraction of coal from the mine, and a loss of jobs to a large sector of the Greymouth community.

Families have to leave the community in search of new occupations, affecting other businesses in the area relying on the occupants' business. The changes resulting because of the disaster are numerous. It is foolish to

even begin to imagine what the families of the miners are experiencing. Then there is the Greymouth community which will also be impacted greatly.

Pike River Mining Disaster – Impact of Change External changes \* The New Zealand Oil & Gas announced there was a bottom line loss of \$75.9 million, reflecting the impact that the Pike River coal mine disaster in the first half of the financial year had. \* KiwiRail's net profit fell by 83%

\* The family of the deceased miners will be greatly affected by the loss of income and the loss of a family member. Financial and emotional difficulty is inevitable in the case of such a disaster but a relief fund was launched to help provide assistance to the dependents of the dead men. \* An impact of the disaster is the opportunity created to the mining community to review its handling of accidents and the safety of mines.

\* The West Coast's economy was impacted after the accident due to the [temporary] closure of the mine. It is estimated that the Pike River Mine has pumped approximately 80 million dollars into the economy, \$13 million of that being in wages alone. However, the economy before the opening of the mine was strong and it was said that the closure would just lead to the economy returning to pre-mine levels. \* Contractors involved with the Pike River Mine are bound to be affected, the smaller companies more than the larger.

Internal changes \* Closure, whether it be temporary or permanent, of Pike River Mine until the results of the inquest are delivered. \* Pike River Coal were that they were unable to pay back debts before their deadlines \* Future of the mine remains unknown leading to suspensions of large contracts and the reviewing of small contracts.

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