
Criminal case into accident in Severnaya mine in Komi sent to court



The Main Investigations Directorate of the Investigative Committee of Russia finished the investigation of a probe into explosions at mine workings of the Severnaya mine in Vorkuta, the Republic of Komi. In total, the accident took away the lives of 36 persons; 17 persons received injuries of varying severity. Among the killed, there were workers of Vorkutaugol JSC and mine rescuers.

The investigators brought to justice 14 persons responsible for the accident. Those include Deputy Director General of Vorkutaugol JSC Denis Paikin; aide for labor protection of the Executive Office of Vorkutaugol JSC Oleg Babichenko; employees of Severnaya Mine of Vorkutaugol JSC: Mine Director Michail Timofeev, his Deputy Vitaliy Lavrov, Chief Technology Officer Viktor Titkov, site No.12 supervisor Oleg Kondratuk, aerological safety supervisor Vladislav Akinchev, his Deputies Andrey Plahov and Alexander Khalichenko, site mechanic Leonid Frolov, electrical mechanic Denis Fedukov, Chief of militarized mine rescue team Leonid Lobkov and his Deputy Oleg Budaev. They are all accused of committing an offense under Part 3 of Article 217 of the Criminal Code of Russia (violations of the industrial safety requirements for hazardous production facilities entailing by negligence infliction of severe health damage, large scale damage and death of two or more persons).

Moreover, Chief State Inspector of the Vorkuta Regional Division of the Pechorsky Directorate of Rostekhnadzor Pavel Malslov is accused of committing an offense under Part 3 of Article 293 of the Criminal Code of Russia (neglect of duty entailing by negligence death of two or more persons and

infliction of large scale damage).

According to the investigation, on February 25 and 28, 2016, several explosions of the methane-air mixture had occurred at mine workings of Severnaya coal mine. Violations of the industrial safety requirements for hazardous production facilities that had caused the tragedy had been regular and present for several years.

As it was established by the investigation, the accident had been a consequence of the intent of the direction of the enterprise to implement the coal production plan to avoid sanctions from higher authorities. Upon instruction or with knowledge of Timofeev, Lavrov, Titkov, Babichenko, Akinchev, Kondratuk, Plahov, and Khalichenko, the safety requirements related to the airing of mine workings had been systematically violated. The coal mining works had never been suspended, which had led to gas contamination of mine goaves. The function of automatic electricity cut-off in case of increasing goaf methane level had been disabled due to Fedukov's intended intervention in the air-gas control system. The necessity of forced roof unsealing had also been ignored, which had led to its collapse with subsequent damage of mining equipment, short circuit, ignition, and an explosion of the methane-air mixture. Maslov had been responsible for supervision over the fulfillment of industrial safety of Severnaya mine which in fact had never been carried out. The first explosion that had caused the death of 30 persons had occurred as a result of the systematic violations of the safety rules.

On February 27, 2016, after the mine rescue operation, Titkov and Budaev in Lobkov's presence had sent mine rescuers and workers of Vorkutaugol JSC to mine workings to eliminate the consequences of the accident. In this, they had been aware that it had been dangerous for people to stay in the mine and that a new explosion had been possible. Paikin, being a technical director of the coal mining organization, seeing such safety violations, had failed to suspend the chief of elimination and to assign a new one and, in fact, removed himself from his duties. At night of February 28, a new explosion had occurred causing the death of 6 persons; 6 persons had been injured.

During the investigation, Khalichenko admitted his guilt and gave testimony on the systematic violations of the mine safety rules. The other accused individuals deny their involvement in the offense.

The investigation gathered enough evidence; therefore, the criminal case with the approved indictment was sent to the court to be tried on the merits.

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