

## NEWS/OBITUARIES

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## Digging for answers

Amid families' grief, investigators must wait for air in mine to clear before they can determine what happened

By ALLEN G. BREED  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## TALLMANSVILLE, W.Va.

As the victims' families made plans for the first of the funerals, officials worked Friday to purge the Sago Mine of poisonous gases and allow investigators to determine what sparked the blast and how the miners spent their final hours.

Workers began drilling three ventilation holes into the mine. But International Coal Group chief executive Ben Hatfield said it could be days before the first investigators go in.

"There are so many things we don't know about what went wrong," Hatfield said. "We don't want to put any more people at risk until we know answers."

The Mine Safety and Health Administration appointed an eight-person team to investigate Monday's blast that killed one miner immediately and left 12 others trapped more than two miles inside. Only one miner was alive when they were found nearly 42 hours later, huddled together behind a plastic curtain erected to keep out deadly carbon monoxide. Investigators said they are looking into all possibilities, including suspicions that lightning ignited naturally occurring methane gas or coal dust. Even before the blast, those



Bill Stemple lights candles at the base of crosses commemorating the four miners from Barbour County, W.Va., who were killed in this week's Sago Mine explosion on Friday in Philippi, W.Va. AP PHOTO

were areas of concern at the mine, which had been cited for violations in 2005 regarding the ventilation plan to control dust and explosive gases.

The accident took place after the mine had been closed for the holiday weekend; the explosion was believed to have originated in an unused section of the mine.

Mine safety experts said gas can build up in a mine after just one day of idled opera-

tions, especially in the winter, when the barometric pressure drops. Also, the metal casings of abandoned natural gas wells above a mine can conduct an electrical current into the ground.

"If this is in fact a strike of lightning onto a well, gas or oil, that sits above an abandoned section of the workings, that well should have had a substantial barrier to avoid this," said David McAteer, who

oversaw MSHA during the Clinton administration. "We've had lightning strikes cause accidents in mines, and they're very disconcerting because they do just what this did. They go down and blow the seals out."

A federal report in 2001 documented at least seven instances in the 1990s alone of methane or coal dust being ignited by lightning, three of those in one mine in Alabama.

"I've heard those theories, but we have no concrete evidence one way or another," said Bob Friend, MSHA's acting deputy assistant secretary of labor for mine safety. "Nothing has been dismissed."

Friend said when the mine is safe to enter, the team will examine every aspect of it, including its physical structures and all equipment. They will be looking for the direction of the explosive forces. They will take dust samples. They will seize any equipment that might have contributed to the blast and, if necessary, test it in a lab.

The investigation will also involve interviews with dozens of people, including the approximately 13 miners who escaped, workers on previous shifts and managers, Friend said.

The sole survivor's recollections could prove crucial. But 26-year-old Randal McCloy Jr. was believed to have brain damage from oxygen deprivation and remained in a medically induced coma Friday at the Pittsburgh hospital where he was moved a day earlier to receive intensive oxygen treatments.

Dr. Richard Shannon suggested rescuers reached McCloy just in time, because it appeared that in his final hour or so in the mine, he lost the ability to sneeze and cough, and his lungs began to fill with coal dust and the low-lying gases as he lay on his side.

Franklin  
Cheryl M. Reid, 62  
Elizabeth B. Roller, 95  
Greenwood  
Roxie N. Howard, 87

GREENWOOD  
Roxie N. Howard

Roxie N. Howard, 87, passed away Thursday, Jan. 5, 2006. She was a resident of Greenwood.

She was born Sept. 1, 1918, in Tamalco, Ill., to the late Ralph and Justin (Tedrick) Norman. She married Charles W. "Huck" Howard on June 7, 1942, in Mulberry Grove, Ill. He preceded her in death. Survivors include her sons, Phil Howard of Greenwood and William C. "Bill" Howard of Costa Mesa, Calif.; a sister, Fannie Mae McAlinney of Chesterfield; five grandchildren, Jill Foley, Suzanne Lammert, Deborah Wilson, Jenelle Howard and Brian Howard; and six great-grandchildren.

She was a member of Greenwood United Methodist Church.

Mrs. Howard was a teacher for Center Grove schools for 26 years, retiring in 1984. She was a member of the Johnson County Retired Teachers Association and the Indiana State Teachers Association.

The Rev. Ann Case will officiate a funeral service at 1 p.m. Monday at Wilson St. Pierre Funeral Service & Crematory, Greenwood Chapel, 481 W. Main St. in Greenwood. Friends may call from 4 to 8 p.m. Sunday at the funeral home.

Memorial contributions may be made to Greenwood United Methodist Church, 525 N. Madison Avenue, Greenwood, IN 46143. Online condolences may be made to the Howard family at www.wilsonstpierre.com.

FRANKLIN  
Cheryl M. (Jackson) Reid

Cheryl M. (Jackson) Reid, 62, died Thursday, Jan. 5, 2006, at Community Hospital South in Indianapolis. She was a resident of Franklin.

Survivors include her three children, Dean, Dennis and Dana Reid, all of Greenwood; three stepchildren, Trycia and Tyler Hollcraft and Heather Lovan; and three grandchildren.

A funeral service will be conducted at 1 p.m. Monday at Jessen Funeral Home, 729 U.S. 31 North in Whiteland. Friends may call from 2 to 8 p.m. Sunday at the funeral home.

Memorial contributions may be made to Cheryl M. Reid Memorial Fund, c/o Jessen Funeral Home, 729 U.S. 31 North, Whiteland, IN 46184.

FRANKLIN  
Elizabeth B. Roller

Elizabeth B. Roller, 95, died Friday, Jan. 6, 2006, at Meadows Convalescent Center in Franklin. She was a former resident of Trafalgar.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Mason Roller.

Arrangements are pending at Meredith-Clark Funeral Home, Cremation and Personalization Center in Morgantown.

## Sharon's prognosis remains negative

The Associated Press

## JERUSALEM

Ariel Sharon underwent five hours of emergency brain surgery Friday that doctors said successfully stopped a hemorrhage and relieved swelling inside his skull. Officials said his condition showed significant improvement but experts said the prognosis remained dire.



SHARON

Sharon's chief surgeon told The Associated Press it was too early to assess how much damage the prime minister suffered after two similar operations in as many days. That determination will have to wait until at least Sunday, when doctors plan to wean him off the drugs that are keeping him in a state they described as a medically induced coma.

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert took calls Friday from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a sign that the Israeli government was moving ahead without its hard-charging leader. Sharon's Kadima Party said it would rally around Olmert, and a new poll showed Kadima emerging victorious in March 28 elections under his leadership.

Palestinian leaders, conducting a parliamentary election of their own Jan. 25, said they were in touch with Israeli officials about Sharon's condition.

The White House declined to speculate on how Sharon's illness could affect the peace process.

"The United States view of the Middle East is that the desire for progress and peace runs wide and deep," spokesman Trent Duffy said. "The president continues to pray for the recovery of Prime Minister Sharon."

As the Sabbath descended on the Jewish state Friday, a vigil for the 77-year-old Sharon became increasingly somber.

## Building

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE)

him about the home for sale. They liked the look of the home but wanted to live in Whiteland. So they asked Allen to build a house for them there.

"I told them, 'You know, I'm sorry, I'm not really in the housing business,'" he said.

Allen knew how to build a home but not about the paperwork and financing that went along with home sales. The couple understood Allen's point and left.

Luckily they were persistent, or Greg Allen Co. might never have existed. The couple had a friend who was a realty agent, whom they took with them to meet with Allen again. The agent agreed to handle the paperwork if Allen built the home.

Allen agreed and built the home. He ended up building one for the agent, too.

"For all intents and purposes, I got into this business by accident," Allen said.

Building more and more single-family homes moved him toward developing a subdivision. He said that prospect made him so nervous his hands shook. His first subdivision was Eagle's Landing in Center Grove.

"You're a homebuilder, doing your first community; if you're human, you're going to be a little anxious," Allen said.

He has built more than 30 communities since then, including Eagle Trace, Forest Hills, Highland Park and Brockton Manor.

Developing subdivisions gives Allen a sense of satisfaction and pride every time he drives past one.

He decided to get involved with commercial development after

## About Greg Allen

Age: 50

**Background:** Raised on the south side of Indianapolis, graduated from Greenwood Community High School in 1973

**Family:** Three adult daughters, an adult son and seven grandchildren.

**Personal property:** Owns a home in Florida. He had the home built. Friends teased him it must have been difficult to have someone else build the home, and they were surprised to hear that Allen visited the construction site only about five times.

attending a homebuilders seminar in the mid-1980s. One of the topics was the challenges of moving from building homes to building offices.

Allen built a 10,000-square-foot wood-framed office building off of State Road 135 and north of Main Street. He later added two buildings and turned the area into an office complex named Library Park.

As he gained experience, he tackled bigger office projects. About 90 percent of his office buildings are used for medical purposes.

He started building for retail use after buying land at the northeast corner of State Road 135 and County Line Road. Walgreens wanted that property,

## THE ALLEN FILE

**Outside interests:** Received his pilot's license about three years ago after taking classes at the Greenwood airport. Plays golf. The last book he read was "Good to Great," a book about why some companies make the leap to success and others do not.

**Business philosophy:** Does not micromanage his company's divisions. He develops employees and lets them handle developing new homes and business.

## About the company

Divisions: Allen Commercial

Group, Princeton Homes and Allen Builders

Employees: 70

**History:** Greg Allen Construction Co. incorporated in the late 1970s. The company has developed more than 30 communities in Indianapolis, Greenwood and Center Grove. Allen started building commercial projects and retail in the late 1980s. He has built more than a dozen Walgreen and CVS stores. About 90 percent of the company's office buildings are for medical use.

gradually started to remove himself from daily operations and focused more on the goals and expansion of his company.

"My focus is getting the right people and getting them in the right position," he said.

Geneva Smith

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