



Safety Campaign Warns That Exploring Mines, Quarries Can Be Deadly

The Mine Safety and Health Administration has an urgent message for hikers, bikers, rock hounds, swimmers and others who congregate unlawfully at mining sites and quarries: "Stay Out – Stay Alive."

MSHA launched its annual public awareness campaign in 1999 to warn children and adults about the dangers of exploring and playing on active and abandoned mine sites. The 2008 campaign kicked off in May with a special emphasis on outreach to young men between 15 and 25 years old.

From 1999 to April 1, 2008, the agency had documented 264 known fatalities at mining and quarry sites across the country, including 118 males in the 15- to 25-year-old demographic. Nearly 175 deaths were a result of drowning.

A May 2007 case in Milford, MA, highlights the dilemma communities face. A 16-year-old boy drowned after falling into a water-filled quarry as deep as 120 feet in some places. The boy was with friends at the edge of the quarry when he apparently tripped and struck his head on rock jutting from the site before hitting the water, Milford Fire officials said. Divers recovered the boy's body on an underwater ledge about 40 feet below.

Milford Deputy Fire Chief Bill Touhey said authorities continually warn young people to stay away from such sites. "It's often very difficult to get the kids to stay away. The sites are often very secluded in the woods. Usually they are teenage boys, but you'll also find some adults in there," Touhey said. He said activity tends to pick up at the sites when the weather is warm.

DEEP DANGER

Although most fatalities result from drowning, abandoned mine shafts – some as deep as office towers – present another hazard, according to Frank Meilinger, Stay Out – Stay Alive campaign coordinator for MSHA. Additionally, trespassers may be confronted by oxygen-depleted shafts, sharp edges, old equipment, cave-ins and explosives, Meilinger said.

Water-filled quarries often contain hidden dangers because of slippery slopes and unstable rock ledges, Meilinger said. "Nobody is immune from this. We know of expert swimmers and divers that have drowned. These places are really cold when you go down that deep in the water," he added.

MSHA estimates there are about 500,000 abandoned mine sites throughout the United States, along with more than 14,000 active operations. Meilinger said the campaign will reach out to young people through announcements and public service messages, including college and high school newspapers and community publications. For the 2008 campaign, a partnership of more than 70 federal and state agencies, private organizations, businesses and individuals will spend the year visiting schools, communities, and youth organizations around the country.

For more information on the campaign, e-mail Meilinger at Meilinger.Frank@dol.gov or visit www.msha.gov/sosa/SOSAhome.asp. The Mine Safety and Health Administration maintains a list of reported mining fatalities for 2008 at www.msha.gov/sosa/fatalstats.asp

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