

All Rush To The Rescue

Miners Compete In Life, Death Contest

By KENNETH LOOMIS

The five men made a last, nervous check of their equipment—oxygen packs, stretchers and devices to test for deadly carbon monoxide or methane gas.

Then they cautiously headed into the simulated mine, "Exposition No. 1."

All they had was the sketchiest of information. They knew there had been an explosion during the day shift and that five men — alive or dead—were still inside.

They were also sure there were other things in the mine, probably fires, sagging walls or roofs, hip-deep water and pockets of gas awaiting a spark or flame to trigger another explosion.

"Exposition No. 1" was one of three "mines" in Louisville that were "racked by explosions" yesterday morning—16 of them, one for each of the rescue teams from four states that took part in the annual National Mine Rescue Contest.

The explosions were only simulated, as were three mines, on the floor of the Exposition Center's East Wing.

For the rescue teams involved, however, it was all deadly serious, a replay of what some of them have already been through many times and a rehearsal for what they must go through again.

Miners themselves make up the rescue teams, spending part of their work week in training, explained A. D. Sisk, a former chief of the Kentucky Department of Mines. Sisk, a native of Madisonville, is now a technical assistant for the U.S. Bureau of Mines, one of the sponsors of the contest.

The men, who work at mines in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, had to fight time during the contest. For every minute longer than the 35 allotted, they were penalized.

And time is crucial in a real mine

disaster, too, Sisk pointed out. Rescue teams carry only enough oxygen for two hours. After that time they must return to a fresh air supply and let a second team take over.

The course laid out at the three simu-

lated mines yesterday was a labyrinth of shafts marked by piping. Barricades marked impassable areas, and simulated gas leaks — with real gas — had to be tested to determine if the gas was carbon monoxide or inflammable methane.

Judges lined the pipe barriers as the team inside the mine area edged along, directed by the team captain's commands from a hand-held bull horn.

The men, wearing oxygen masks, marked each turn carefully on both the floor and a map and were linked together by rope, just as they would be in the smoke and darkness of a real mine disaster. When they passed a card denoting "dense smoke," they donned glasses.

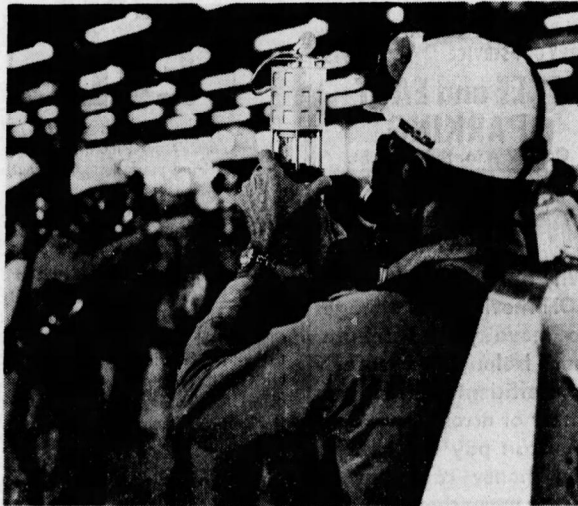
Each Rescued One Victim

Each team found one live victim, played by a relief member of their squad, and had to carry him to safety. The other four men in the problem were dead, and they were represented by mannequins.

Along the way, the teams were expected to take advantage of simulated wreckage to build drop-curtain barricades to maintain safe airlocks and prevent the spread of pockets of lethal or flammable gases.

And, alongside the last body, only several feet from a "fire," was a pack of cigarettes and a lighter — supposedly the cause of the explosion — to provide an additional lesson in safety for the participants.

Today and tomorrow many of the rescue teams will take part in another phase of the contest—first-aid competition. Winners of the two competitions will be announced tomorrow.



Staff Photo

READY FOR RESCUE . . . One of the five men on the Armco Steel Corp. mine rescue team from Mount Coal, W. Va., adjusts his permissible flame safety lamp before entering a simulated mine at the Fairgrounds Exposition Center. The lamp indicates the proportion of oxygen and methane in the atmosphere. The team was one of 16 entered in the National Mine Rescue Contest yesterday.

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