

## Miners hone rescue, first-aid skills, take home trophies at national contest

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Staff Writer

Fresh from a caucus with examiners, the Utah Power & Light Co. mine rescue team huddled in a darkened corridor yesterday, griping about criticism of their recent rescue effort.

"They said we put conditions on the mine map that we shouldn't have," grumbled 31-year-old Jim Behling, the team's captain. "But we did it right."

"Our primary job was to clear the gas and take that man outside, which we did," declared Forrest Addison, 31, the team's map man.

Four workers had been trapped in a mine with insecure roofing, flooding, noxious and explosive methane fumes, and a fire of undetermined origin. In 48 minutes, 37 seconds, the five-member team had located the source of the fire — a machine that stabilizes the mine roof with bolts — and established barriers to ventilate the mine and thereby rescue the lone survivor, who had barricaded himself from gas fumes and smoke-filled air.

The rescue operation was a test, simulating emergency conditions in a coal mine, and the examiners were part of a team of judges who rated the work of contestants at the

32nd National Mine Rescue and First Aid Contest in Louisville.

Ninety-one teams from mining firms across the country are competing in the contest, which began Monday and ends tomorrow at the Kentucky Fair & Exposition Center.

And the passion expressed by the Utah Power & Light team (one of two competing from the firm's mining division) was typical.

The competition is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration, which awards trophies in rescue and first aid events.

But mine safety officials say the deeper aim is to hone vital rescue

expertise needed in an industry whose components create the potential for explosions, fire and death.

"This gives miners a chance to practice skills that, hopefully, they will never use," said Ernie Teaster, a program analyst for MSHA.

Taught by an instructor certified by the mine safety agency, miners learn to operate breathing packs, to detect and disperse explosive gases and to systematically explore mines whose natural components have turned hazardous.

Coal breathes ignitable methane gas that can cause explosions, and the federal agency approves ventilation patterns when underground

mines are constructed.

Heat, debris, and problems with heavy mining equipment can mean disaster, and many mines, built below the water table, need to be pumped continuously. When accidents occur, the mines often flood, requiring systematic methods to rescue trapped workers, extinguish fires or restore proper ventilation.

Training of rescue squads, miners and federal officials say, has helped decrease mine fatalities by two-thirds in the past 20 years, from 382 in 1969 to 102 last year.

"Because miners are better trained than ever before, disasters involving major loss of life are no

longer common," said Terry Browning, director of safety and employee development at the St. Louis-based Arch Minerals Corp. "There was always classroom training, but now it's been supplemented with hands-on training, and it's really made a difference."

Last year, for example, a fire in a power distribution center in the firm's Lynch, Ky., mine was extinguished without difficulty.

"But because of this training, the workers knew not to travel down a smoky entry," he said. "They knew where the fire equipment was, and they knew how to use it."

## 1989 National Mine Rescue Contest

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