

STATEMENT BY PETER FORBES

I, PETER FORBES, am employed at West Cliff Colliery as a deputy on Evening Shift regular. On 12th December 1986 I was deployed to Longwall 7 for the purpose of monitoring the polyurethane plug that had been put in place during the preceding shifts.

I had received instructions from Paul Harrington, the Undermanager in Charge, who had told me that when he had last been in there, he could not see the tailgate for the fumes coming off. When he left, he said it was pretty clear and you could see the tailgate quite clearly. He said that if it got so that I could not see the tailgate, I was to notify him straight away.

I had also been given an assistant, Bill Morris, whose job was to stay with me throughout the shift.

On arrival at the maingate of Longwall 7 at the start of the shift, we went down to the site of the cavity and had a look around. We did not go on the return side. There was not any great sign of smoke at all. It was similar to water haze - very fine, white fumes.

On the way down to the site, we took one big and two small Siebe Gormans in case of an emergency.

We arrived at about 8.10 p.m. and remained at the site for about 20 minutes and I did my inspections outbye. After I had completed my inspections on the maingate side, Bruce Hadley, the Shift Undermanager, arrived with an A.C.I.R.L. representative and a Chemfix representative. We went back up to the site of the cavity. They had a temperature probe which is like a fishing rod, and they took temperatures of the plug over the top and on the side between 87 and 88 chock. I heard them say that the temperature over the top of the plug was 27°C and after taking a second reading it had reduced to 24°C. They left about 10.00 p.m..

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Just before Bruce left, a little more smoke seemed to appear. It was not a white haze - it was a whitish smoke.

We stayed at the site for a further period and then we went for our crib from some time between 10.30 p.m. and 11.30 p.m. After we had crib we returned to the site at around 11.30 p.m. to 11.45 p.m. We had a look around and it had not changed a great deal from the condition it was in after Bruce left. We stayed 5 - 10 minutes and went back to the maingate.

I was at the maingate for $\frac{3}{4}$ hour and I instructed Billy to service his machine. This was 12.35 a.m.

I returned to the face at about 12.45 a.m. I walked up the face conveyor. I went around the shearer and then climbed back onto the face conveyor. At that time I saw flames showing out in front of 87/88 chock.

I grabbed a fire extinguisher and discharged it into the cavity where the flames were being emitted in front of 87/88 chock. The flames were approximately .6 metres long from the tip to the stonedust. The edges of the stonedust bags were burnt.

I went back towards the shearer and got a second extinguisher and, coming back to the site, I saw a glow in the cavity. I discharged the second extinguisher through the observation hole into the cavity.

I then obtained a third extinguisher and I discharged this one on the flame at 87/88 chock.

After discharging the three extinguishers, it did not seem to have much effect at all. So I returned with haste to the maingate. I sang out to Bill Morris that we had a fire. I waited for him to acknowledge that he had heard me.

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On the way past the fire depot at the main gate, I grabbed two hoses, a breach and a nozzle. By the time Bill arrived I gave him one hose and we went up and ran the hoses out. We turned the water on and directed the hose on the fire between 87/88 chock. The fire died down quite a bit, with virtually no flame at all, and then we returned and directed it into the cavity.

In the meantime, the area at 87/88 had reignited. Bill Morris returned with the hose from the cavity and directed it onto the flame at 87/88 again. We put the flame out and returned to put the hose in the cavity.

While Bill was hosing into the cavity, I put the Siebe Gorman on and went up to the tailgate to see if I could connect another hose into the hydrant liner at the other end. When I got there, I noticed I could not hook the fire hose onto the hydrant because of a Tee-piece on the hydrant which had been fitted for the tailgate bolters.

I returned to Bill and said I will go and get another hose and ring up Bruce and tell him what is going on.

At about 10.25 p.m. I rang Bruce Hadley, the Shift Undermanager, and told him we had a fire and that we seemed to have it under control. He said he would send another crew of men in.

I took another hose from the fire depot and ran it out in between the chocks from the breaching piece at 54 chock. Whilst I was doing this, Bill Morris was still discharging water into the cavity. I told Bill we would put two hoses into operation so that one could be directed into the cavity whilst the other one was on the hot spot at 87/88 chocks.

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The other men arrived by that time and they assisted and connected the second hose into the system. Water was applied in the top cavity and also in 87/88 chocks.

The fire was virtually out and we commenced to pull stonedust bags out away from the 87/88 area which appeared to be the base of the fire. We pulled quite a few bags out and found some charred material which we put in a bag and brought to the surface.

We continually hosed down. We put a lot more water into the top of the cavity to make sure there was no chance of the fire developing there, and pulled more bags away from the assumed fire site in front of 87/88 chocks, when Paul Harrington, the first rescue team captain arrived.

After discussion with Paul we left the site and travelled out of the pit. There was myself, Billy Morris, Barry Banks, Ray Brandner, Neil Campbell and Charlie Gibbs.

Q: Prior to going to Longwall 7, what instructions had been given to you by the Undermanager?

A: Virtually to be an observer and monitor the area where the polyurethane plug had been installed.

Q: Were you told what to look for?

A: If the fumes got worse, I was to notify the Undermanager.

Q: Did you request an assistant?

A: No. Billy Morris was allocated to my by the Undermanager.


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Q: During your inspections, what concentration of methane did you detect in the area?

A: Very low - in the order of 0.2% to 0.3%. I tested between the chocks and on the face side of the conveyor.

Q: When you took the bags of stonedust out of the wall at 87/88 check, did you notice whether there was an air flow between the stonedust wall and the brattice cloth?

A: No - In my opinion I thought the air was going up through the observation hole into the cavity and appeared to be going down the back and coming out where the flame was at 87/88.



PETER FORBES

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