

August 7, 2008**EDITORIAL**

Greed Above, Death Below

The need for a criminal inquiry into the Crandall Canyon mine disaster is shockingly clear now that investigators have detailed how greedy mine operators concealed danger warnings and literally chiseled underground pillar supports to the breaking point. The roof of the Utah mine collapsed last summer, killing six miners and leading three would-be rescuers to their deaths.

The mine's operator, Genwal Resources, a subsidiary of the Murray Energy Corporation, has insisted that an earthquake caused the collapse. But a federal investigation concluded that the mine was "primed for a massive pillar collapse" after management mined beyond safety limits to scrape extra coal profits from the floor and supports. Compounding the tragedy, the company never alerted federal monitors to three earlier outbursts — the last only three days before the disaster — in which pressure from above caused coal to explode from winnowed supports. No miners were harmed, but the company clearly was alerted to trouble brewing below.

Separate investigations by mine safety and Labor Department officials have left grieving families haunted by evidence that the deaths might have been avoided if the company had not flouted deep-mine safety rules. Investigators found the company's engineering plan was dangerous in its design and should never have been accepted by the Mine Safety and Health Administration. Existing computer models could have demonstrated this, but overseers failed to consult them. The safety administration also failed to take full control of the rescue.

Crandall Canyon provided a gross demonstration of regulators' obeisance to the industry. This is a life-threatening flaw that has grown under the Bush administration's pro-industry practices. The need for stronger laws and more conscientious regulation grows urgent as the industry booms once more in the energy crisis. The men buried in Crandall Canyon deserve justice.

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