



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Daniel R. Munsey
Fire Chief / Fire Warden



DATE: *March 8, 2020*
CONTACT: *Mike McClintock, Battalion Chief / Public Information Officer*
(909) 677-7413, MMcClintock@sbcfire.org
Jeremy Kern, Captain / Public Information Officer (760) 998-1458 mobile

15 Hour Mine Rescue Results in Successful Rescue and Minor Injuries

Date/Time: Sunday, March 8, 2020, 5:00 am
Location: Gold Crown Road, Twentynine Palms
Incident: Mine Rescue #: 20-054362

Summary: In the early morning hours of Sunday, March 8th, San Bernardino County Fire crews were dispatched to a reported mine rescue in rural, unincorporated Twentynine Palms. Initial units found the reporting party in the area of Golden Crown Road; they were told that a group had entered a mine, and one of the members, an adult male, was unable to get out. While uninjured, he was stuck hundreds of feet in the mine.

With the updated information, potential complexity and hazards of a mine rescue, multiple Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams were requested from #SBCoFD and Combat Center Fire. While USAR crews were in-route to the remote area, on-scene resources continued to make access and develop a rescue plan.

Initial access was hindered due to the remote location which was restricted to 4-wheel drive capable apparatus. Drive time from Golden Crown Road to the mine's entrance took approximately 45 minutes through that 4x4 terrain.

#USAR teams made access to the mine and established a deployment point where equipment was cached, and teams were outfitted. Rescuers rigged themselves with harnesses, multiple light sources, rope rescue gear, as well as hard wired communications equipment prior to their entry.

The initial entry was small which required belly crawling for the first 50 feet. At this point a large gap was found which required a safety line to be placed horizontally. Crews negotiated along a 14-inch ledge which had a significant drop below it. This is where the first of three vertical shafts were found.

The first drop was about 200 feet. Rescuers climbed down an existing wooden ladder while safety lines were in place. The next horizontal section was 150 feet with a vertical clearance that required a combination of kneeling and more belly crawling. At this point the second horizontal drop was found which required rescuers to establish and anchor a rope system within the confines of the mine. This section had two points where the vertical shaft shifted laterally. The last horizontal section was 100 feet long and led to a 90-foot vertical drop. This was the bottom point where the victim was found.

-more-

Crews as well as the victim were forced to deal with high temperatures as well as humidity along with a total dependence on artificial light inside the mine. Verbal communication was also limited between firefighters as they progressed through the different sections. In all the distance was estimated to be over 900 feet.

Once contact was made with the victim, it was determined he would need to be hauled out by rope systems through the multiple vertical sections. This required additional rescuers to establish a separate rope system with anchors inside the mine. Slowly a group of 6 rescuers used the established systems to raise the victim through the multiple sections of the mine.

Ultimately the subject was removed from the mine at 8pm, fifteen hours after the call was received. It was learned that the two subjects had entered the mine at 11pm the night before; this meant the subject had been at the bottom for nearly 20 hours. While exhausted, the male victim received only minor injuries. He was evaluated by paramedics but declined transport to the hospital.

County Fire responded with 3 Heavy Rescues, 3 engines, 1 squad, multiple 4x4 utilities, and 3 chief officers for a total of 35 personnel. Multiple off duty members of the County Fire USAR CA-RTF-6 responded on recall. The Combat Center Fire department assisted with personnel and equipment as well.

Mine exploration is considered a dangerous activity by many. In the United States, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) has run an annual "Stay Out-Stay Alive" national public safety campaign to warn children about the dangers of exploring and playing on mine property. They claim that since 1999, nearly 150 children and adults have died in recreational accidents at active and abandoned mine and quarry sites, although the majority of these were not related to mine exploration. Abandoned mine sites pose many safety hazards. Many of these structures contain dilapidated frames, open shafts, and water-filled pits. The dangers that are found in the mines include old explosives, hazardous chemicals, bats, snakes, spiders, bobcats, mountain lions and other predators.

Mines are located in every state — from small sand and gravel operations to complex underground coal, salt, limestone or metal mines, to extensive surface operations that use some of the largest industrial equipment ever built. There are about 14,000 active and as many as 500,000 abandoned mines in the nation. As cities and towns spread into the surrounding countryside and more people visit remote locations, the possibility of contact with an active or abandoned mine increases.

###