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28 New Zealand Gold Miners Rescued After Fire

July 17, 2012

Rescuers saved 28 miners who were trapped underground for up to seven hours on Tuesday as smoke from a truck engine fire spread through the gold mine where they had been working. Mine spokesman Kit Wilson said one man was being checked by medical officials for suspected smoke inhalation but the rest were fine. The engine caught fire early Tuesday at the Trio mine in the North Island town of Waihi. Mine officials said the ventilation system pumped smoke through the mine and it could be seen coming out the vent shaft.

Initially, 28 men were trapped about 150 meters (500 feet) underground in safety chambers. After more than 5 hours, 13 men taking refuge in two safety chambers were rescued. After seven hours, the remaining men in a third chamber were also rescued.

"Apparently they are all in good spirits and are raring to go home and have a sleep," he said.

The men were two hours from finishing a 10-hour overnight shift when the fire broke out.

Wilson said it's not yet clear what sparked the fire in the diesel engine. He said diesel vehicles regularly enter the mine.

The mine is owned by Denver-based Newmont, one of the world's largest gold producers. Newmont has 43,000 employees and contractors in a number of countries.

Linda Willoughby, another mine spokesperson, said mine officials were in telephone contact with the trapped miners throughout their ordeal. She said that unlike some coal mines that contain volatile methane gas, the hardrock mine faced no threat of an explosion.

Willoughby said the men followed their training after the fire by taking refuge in the underground chambers. Wilson added that many of the miners at first thought the incident was a drill.

Written by Associated Press

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