

Team work is the key in mine rescue

by Rob Cotton
The News

Prior to 1928, there was little realization that underground fires and explosions could possibly occur in Ontario mines.

Such disasters, with considerable loss of life, had taken place in metal mines elsewhere but Ontario received a rude awakening in 1928 when 39 men were asphyxiated as the result of an underground fire at the Hollinger gold mine in the Porcupine District.

As a result of that disaster suitable mine rescue equipment was purchased and training programs set-up for its proper use.

Today the Mining Health and Safety Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Labour provides training in mine rescue and recovery operations to workmen and supervisors at Ontario mines.

The work, is carried out from mine rescue stations in the principal mining districts.

The culmination of this training can be seen during the Mine Rescue Competitions that are held around the province.

Brian Gemmill of Minnova Mines, Winston Lake Division, said the competitions serve two purposes.

First, they give mine rescue teams additional opportunities for training and to hone their skills in a simulated situation that is as close to a real emergency as possible.

Today all underground mines have

specially trained teams which are ready to deal with any emergency encountered underground - a fire, an explosion, a cave-in, an inrush of water, etc.

"During the competitions these teams perform the work normally done by four or five teams in a real emergency," Gemmill said.

This helps to create the atmosphere of pressure that they would encounter in a real situation, he explained.



The Minnova Rescue Team at work during the recent Mine Rescue Competition in Schreiber. photo courtesy of Minnova

Five men, who have successfully completed the basic, standard and advanced mine rescue courses as well as a minimum of two years on the job training make up a mine rescue team.

In an underground emergency situation the lives of others as well as their own are dependent on these men oper-

ating as team.

Each team has a captain who coordinates the operation of the team.

A mine rescue man is a volunteer, trained in mine rescue work and first aid. He must be completely familiar with the Drager breathing apparatus which he wears, he must know a great deal about gases he might encounter underground when a fire is burning or after an explosion and he must be phys-

ically and mentally fit in order to react quickly to emergencies.

The second purpose of the competitions is to help standardize the procedures that mine rescue teams use through out the province.

Approximately 50 men, from the eight provincial districts, take part in

the Mine Rescue Competitions at the district level. The eight top teams then compete for the provincial trophy.

"Because the competitions all use the same problem it ensures the standardization of training and procedures," Gemmill said.

A mine rescue man from any part of the province could participate in any mine rescue operation in the province, he added.

The need to standardize training and methods of operation became clear in 1947 when, for the first time, men from different districts in Ontario worked together in a rescue operation.

Volunteer rescue teams from Kirkland Lake, Timmins and Sudbury assisted with a major fire at the East Malartic gold mine in Quebec, in which 11 men lost their lives.

At the recent District Mine Rescue Competitions, hosted by Minnova Mines in Schreiber a fire in a soft rock gypsum mine was simulated. Solving the problem would include firefighting, correcting or re-establishing ventilation and rescuing men.

A fire broke out when leaking fuel oil from underground storage tanks was ignited by an electrical pump in a nearby sump.

The mine filled with smoke isolating miners in an underground refuge station.

One man, on his way to safety crashed his vehicle into a wall injuring

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THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Those arriving for the meeting seemed a bit apprehensive. Someone had decided that the chairs should be in a circle, but there was no feeling of intimacy. People were choosing to sit apart, not together, as they arrived.

The small room off the kitchen gradually became too crowded. Eventually, one of the organizers asked everyone to pick up the chairs. The meeting was moving to the other end of the Cultural Centre, to a larger room. To the organizers' surprise, over 35 people had turned out for "the native community forum on racism in the school system."

The Ontario Native Women's Association and Race Relations Thunder Bay organized the meeting to vent public perceptions and experiences with racism in the school system. They invited a guest speaker, Mavis Burke, a special advisor on race relations from Toronto with the Ministry of Education.

Corrine Nabigone, the President of Ontario Native Women, opened the meeting by burning sweet grass, and offering a prayer. Gradually, the nervousness in the room dissipated as she asked everyone to introduce themselves. "Tell us where you're coming from," she asked. Everyone, it seemed from the introductions, had a reason to be there; bureaucrats from federal and provincial departments concerned about multiculturalism or race relations, native parents, unemployed native teachers who couldn't find jobs, ministers of churches, and journalists looking for a story.

Then Mavis Burke, with her melodic accent, told us she emigrated from Jamaica 20 years ago, got her doctorate from the University of Ottawa, then got a job as an immigration consultant with the Toronto board of education. Now she works for the province, during what she described as "a healing time - when those who traditionally have not been heard, are going to be heard."

Burke outlined the NDP government's anti-racism strategy, which she said was "setting the tone for the whole government." She explained how the province had decided to change the Liberal policy from "race relations" to an "anti-racism strategy".

"It's not just saying that we're going to love one another, although I hope we are," she explained, "But it says that the focus is on the institutions and how they accommodate the diversity of Ontario." In the education system specifically, she explained how the Minister of Education intends to introduce an amendment to the Education Act in this session of the legislature, to give the Minister "the authority to make it mandatory that school boards in Ontario develop and implement ethno-cultural and anti-racism policies". According to Burke, about half the boards in Ontario already have an anti-racism policy, or are developing one.

These anti-racism policies won't just

focus on individuals, or even the curriculum. "We are looking right across the board at the entire school system. We are looking at the possibility of systemic discrimination. We are looking at the outcomes of schooling. Until now, usually we have done the right thing by emphasizing access. We said everybody must have equal access. Now I think we are looking at things in a more complex way. We are saying yes, everyone must have access. But we

NORTHERN INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders



also have to look at what happens at the end. And if equal access to schooling that is doomed to failure at the end is what happens, then that is not equality."

After Burke spoke, those assembled had their chance. One by one, everyone told their story. Two native women each told stories about confronting racist teachers. Native post-secondary students, including some who had just graduated from teachers' college, complained about not being able to find work.

A native preacher asked about the curriculum; "Will it be taught in the schools that the native people are the first people of Canada, and that all other ethnic groups that came in succession behind them be honoured and respected in the same way? Can that be taught in our school system? From there, we might be able to build this country into a better place to live, including the

French, and our constitution might come into being, as it should be."

There were several complaints and stories about racist incidents, but also some solutions offered, including:

- appointing a native "ombudsman" who could help parents investigate and follow up complaints of racism within the school system.

- require school boards to use the Ministry curriculum document PONA, People of Native Ancestry, which has been praised by native leaders as truly reflective of aboriginal history and values, instead of leaving the document to gather dust on school board shelves.

- changing the education that teachers receive at teachers college.

Moving anywhere close to these and other solutions, however, requires understanding by those in charge that indeed there is a problem with racism in Ontario schools. I have yet to see that understanding reflected in trustee or administration eagerness to develop policies and practices that actively combat racism. Significantly, there were no representatives from either the public or catholic school boards at this meeting.

As Burke put it, "We've got to back off from looking at various groups as problems. Problems arise, in my view, not by virtue of race or colour or ethnicity, but when people are disadvantaged by a system...and in this case, it's mainly by a school system."

In other words, the problem is not visible minorities seeking justice and

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