



## Bush signs bill overhauling mine safety

**WASHINGTON (CNN) -- As the only survivor of a deadly mine explosion and relatives of lost miners looked on, President Bush on Thursday signed a bill he called the most sweeping safety overhaul of the American mine industry in nearly three decades.**

"America's miners work hard every day to support their families and support this country," Bush said. "It's hard work. You deserve the best training and the best equipment and safeguards that we can provide to protect your lives."

In the past year, 33 American miners have died in mine accidents. They include 12 who died at West Virginia's Sago Mine after a January explosion and five who died last month after a blast in Kentucky.

"Thanks to modern technology and equipment, we've come a long way from the days a miner would take a canary in the mines," Bush said. "But events in recent months have reminded us that mining is dangerous work."

The sole survivor of the Sago explosion, Randal McCloy, and his wife, Anna, were among those attending the signing ceremony. McCloy, 27, received a standing ovation as he walked in.

"We know, and I hope you know, that your fallen mining brothers are here with us in spirit," Bush told McCloy.

He told emotional family members, many of whom were holding pictures of their loved ones, that in signing the bill he honors the memory of those miners who died.

The new law, called the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response, or MINER Act, is supported by coal industry officials and the United Mine Workers. It requires more oxygen supplies underground, stronger seals on abandoned mine shafts, two-way communication throughout a mine and less distance between miners and rescue teams.

The law doubles the amount of emergency air that must be given to each miner -- a two-hour supply instead of enough for a single hour.

Mining companies are required to report a possible accident within 15 minutes of its occurrence; they also are required to install fire-resistant lifelines to help miners find their way out in an emergency.

Companies also are required to stash larger oxygen supplies along mine escape routes. The law increases penalties for those violating mine safety laws.

"We make this promise to American miners and their families: We'll do everything possible to prevent accidents and make sure you're able to return safely to your loved ones," Bush said.

Some critics, including some victims' relatives, have said the bill does not go far enough, claiming that miners need safe rooms and even more oxygen. Many of those who died underground, they pointed out, were there for days, not hours.

McCloy and 12 other miners spent more than 40 hours underground before rescue teams were able to reach them in the Sago Mine. By the time they did, all but McCloy were dead.

In an April letter sent to the families of the other miners, McCloy said that at least four of the miners' breathing packs did not work. The group shared, but there was still not enough air to go around, he said.

McCloy was hospitalized for nearly three months, undergoing treatment for neurological and physical damage caused by carbon monoxide poisoning. He was released March 30.

Joe Manchin, West Virginia governor, and Sen. Robert Byrd, D-West Virginia, were among officials speaking in support of the bill after the ceremony.

"The signing of this legislation is not the end," said Byrd, who identified himself as a coal miner's son. "We have much to do."

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