



Chinese Mine Death Toll Rises to 169

Saturday, December 03, 2005

Associated Press

BEIJING — The death toll from a [coal mine](#) explosion in northern [China](#) reached 169 Saturday, making it one of the country's worst mining disasters in decades, while a separate flood trapped 42 miners, officials said.

The explosion and flood are the latest disasters highly embarrassing to China's Communist-led government, which has repeatedly promised to do more about mine safety.

Mine accidents in China killed 6,027 people last year, according to government figures — a rate of 16 deaths a day.

Many of the disasters are blamed on managers who ignore safety rules or fail to install required ventilation or fire control equipment, often in collusion with local officials. The issue is further complicated by the country's soaring demand for power to drive its booming economy.

The death toll from an explosion a week ago at the [Dongfeng](#) Coal mine in China's bitterly cold northeast rose to 169 after searchers found three more bodies in the underground debris, the official Xinhua News Agency said. Rescuers searched shafts at the mine in Heilongjiang province for two more missing workers, it said.

Meanwhile, at the private [Sigou Coal Mine](#) in Henan province's Xin'An county, 76 workers were underground when the mine flooded around 11:40 p.m. Friday, Xinhua said. Thirty-four miners escaped.

The mine had no safety license, and mine owner Jin Changsong allegedly went into hiding after the accident, Xinhua reported.

About 200 rescuers were pumping water out of the mine and trying to reach those trapped, Xinhua said, but there was no indication if they had survived or not.

The explosion at the Dongfeng mine in Heilongjiang ranked among the deadliest in memory, capping a year that opened with an even larger industrial disaster.

In February, a gas explosion killed 214 miners at the Sunjiawan coal mine in Liaoning province, the worst mining disaster reported in the country since Communists took control in 1949.

The head of China's State Administration of Coal Mine Safety, Zhao Tiechui, visited the Dongfeng mine Saturday, promising to shut down 4,000 small coal mines every year for the next three years in an effort to boost industry safety, Xinhua said.

China is hoping to consolidate and reform its mining industry to boost productivity and to reduce pollution and accidents. There now are about 24,000 small mines, Xinhua said.

Also in Heilongjiang, officials have been racing to limit the damage of a massive chemical spill into one of the country's major rivers, the Songhua.

The spill of benzene into the Songhua from a deadly chemical plant explosion on Nov. 13 has resulted in the cutoff of river-fed water supplies to millions of people from northern China to the Russian border. It also prompted the resignation Friday of China's chief environmental regulator.

The Songhua spill, the Dongfeng explosion and other frequent industrial accidents are embarrassing for China's leadership, which has sought to portray itself as attuned to the concerns of common people, especially farmers and miners.