

1-10-2007

# Mining Company To Abandon Mine Damaged In 2006 Explosion

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

---

## Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Mining Company To Abandon Mine Damaged In 2006 Explosion." (2007). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5061>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## Mining Company To Abandon Mine Damaged In 2006 Explosion

*by Carlos Navarro*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 2007-01-10*

Grupo Mexico is planning to permanently shut down the infamous Pasta de Conchos coal mine in Coahuila state, the site of a major explosion in February 2005 that claimed 65 lives. The decision comes as the company faces sanctions from the Coahuila state government and a new joint investigation by the federal government and a congressional committee. The underground explosion, which is thought to have resulted from poor ventilation, collapsed a large portion of the facility. That destruction, along with the constant presence of toxic gases, has prevented authorities from retrieving the bodies of the victims. Only two of the 65 bodies have been recovered since the explosion. The body of one victim was recovered in late December 2006, following the recovery of another body in June.

The explosion left major doubts that Grupo Mexico would be able to resume operations at the Pasta de Conchos mine near the community of San Juan de Sabinas. The company held off on any official announcement about the fate of the facility until early January, however. "The installations were destroyed by multiple collapses, and it is not possible to use this infrastructure," said Juan Rebolledo, Grupo Mexico's vice president for international relations. "Our only purpose at the site now is to continue the search and recovery of the bodies of the 63 miners who remain trapped inside," said Rebolledo.

The company has thus far spent about 292 million pesos (US\$26.6 million) on the rescue operation. The company will make a decision later on whether to establish a new mine in the area. "But Pasta de Conchos will not operate again," said Rebolledo. The accident brought attention to the poor working conditions for Mexican miners. The bad ventilation and other structural problems contributed to an accumulation of deadly methane gas. Critics say conditions at some of the mines operated by Grupo Mexico are especially bad ([SourceMex, March 1, 2006](#)).

### *Coahuila government to prosecute company, federal inspectors*

The Pasta de Conchos explosion prompted Coahuila state authorities to conduct an exhaustive investigation over the course of several months. Preliminary results of the probe indicate that the company and federal inspectors did not correct unsafe conditions even though they were detected eight months before the explosion.

Coahuila state authorities are planning to release full details of their investigation sometime in early February. "We were able to prove there were deficiencies in the mine's ventilation system, and we also have verified a presence of methane gas larger than the permitted amounts, among other (safety) omissions," said Jorge Rios, the PGJEC's special prosecutor in charge of the Pasta de Conchos case. This has prompted the Procuraduria General de Justicia del Estado de Coahuila (PGJEC) to seek charges against five managers at the site and five federal inspectors.

The federal Secretaria del Trabajo y Prevision Social (STPS) conducted a routine inspection of the mine 12 days before the explosion. In a report released after the inspection, Pedro Camarillo, the STPS representative in Coahuila at the time, said nothing unusual was found at the site. Rios said, however, that STPS inspectors had "limited themselves to checking just a few of the problems the inspectors had found and didn't even check the whole mine." "Without doubt there was negligence by the Secretaria del Trabajo regarding verification of safety conditions in the mine," said Coahuila attorney general Jesus Torres Charles in testimony before a congressional committee in early January. "There was negligence on the part of the mining company, which should have met its obligations to ensure that conditions in the mine were safe."

The administration of President Felipe Calderon has committed to take a more active role in the case. Calderon's predecessor, President Vicente Fox, was criticized for failing to do enough to investigate the cause of the explosion and to recover the bodies of the victims. The STPS and the Congress have created a task force, which has set as its priorities to recover the bodies of the 63 other victims of the explosion, increase compensation and provide support for the families of the dead miners, and investigate the circumstances and determine responsibility for the accident.

Leading the task force are Labor Secretary Javier Lozano Alarcon and Deputy Yericco Abramo Masso, who represents Coahuila state in the lower house and is a member of the opposition Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Lozano said the task force, which will work closely with the administration of Coahuila Gov. Humberto Moreira, will use the results of the Pasta de Conchos study to determine how safety conditions can be improved in other mining operations around the country. The special congressional committee investigating the case has pledged to resolve all issues related to the incident. "The Chamber of Deputies...wants to reassure the 90 children who were left orphans by the tragedy that someone is working on their behalf," said Abramo Masso. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Jan. 10, reported at 10.96 pesos per US\$1.00]

-- End --