

## Structure of Mine Rescue Teams

A typical mine rescue team in the US is comprised of 6 to 8 team members. A description of team positions and functions is as follows:

- **Team Captain** — the leader of the team, responsible for guiding the team in the proper route and direction and ensuring the safety of team members. While traveling, the captain will make continuous examinations, both visually and with instruments, to ensure that the team is not led into an unsafe area or exposed to an unsafe condition. The captain also will be the final decision-maker on what functions and duties the team will, or will not, perform.
- **Map Man** — Usually travels directly behind the captain, maintains an accurate and detailed map of the area the team explores, and assists the captain in determining the direction and route of travel during exploration.
- **Gas Men** — Usually travel in the 3 and 4 positions, carry equipment for detecting mine and fire gases to assist the captain in determining gas concentrations and team safety. Also, the gas men usually carry a stretcher for rescue of a live person, which will be loaded with extra equipment the team may need, including an extra breathing apparatus, SCSRs, first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and assorted hand tools.
- **Tail Captain** — Travels at the rear of the 5-man team and assists in ensuring the safety of the team members in front. The tail captain maintains constant communication to the mine surface or fresh air base to report findings, conditions and information concerning the team exploration and leads the team out of the newly explored areas back to the surface or fresh air base.
- **Briefing Officer** — Stationed at the surface or fresh air base to stay in constant communication with the team. The briefing officer reports and relays information from the team to the command center and helps direct the team travel. He will always have wireless or hard-wired radios to stay in contact with the tail captain while the team is exploring.
- **Alternates** — Usually a team will include some alternate team members who are fully trained in wearing the breathing apparatus and can be substituted into any of the working positions.

The foremost function of a mine rescue team is to ensure the safety of the team members, and to avoid making changes to the mine environment that may endanger themselves, miners, or other working teams. Teams must also follow the directions of the command center explicitly, and not free-lance or perform duties without first consulting the command center and receiving permission. Teams must report conditions and findings accurately and in great detail. Teams must work as a well-functioning unit. This knowledge and experience is gained through intensive and repetitive training in the classroom, on the practice field, in underground training situations, and through participation in mine rescue contests.

Prior to entering an unexplored area of a mine, a team must receive a detailed briefing by a representative of the command center, concerning the event, the circumstances and conditions that are known and unknown, and be given specific directions and tasks to be performed. The team must receive an accurate map of the area so that they can explore and evaluate conditions accurately and document findings. After performing their duties and returning to the surface, teams must be debriefed by a representative of the command center, on the conditions they encountered, and on general information they discovered during their exploration. This debriefing should be thorough and detailed, and the information used by the members of the command center to evaluate and plan future excursions into the mine.

Typically, in current rescue operations, the five-person team will be accompanied on their exploration or assignment by a federal and/or state mine inspector, who is a rescue team member of their respective agency, and who is fully trained in the use, care, and maintenance of the breathing apparatus, and in mine rescue procedures.