

NEWS RELEASE

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Remembering lives lost in BC's worst mining disaster

Explosions in No. 1 Esplanade Mine 136 years ago killed 150 miners

Summary

Explosions started at 5:55 pm on May 3, 1887, 260 meters below sea level in what was known as the city's largest mine, No. 1 Esplanade Mine.

The blast was so forceful it rocketed through the underground shafts for almost a kilometre and the underground fire burned for two weeks. Because of such damage, the last of the bodies could not be recovered until July and unfortunately seven men never were recovered and remain somewhere beneath the Nanaimo Harbour to this day.

This tragic accident took the lives of 150 miners, a massive loss to a community of approximately 2,000 people at the time. Forty six women lost their husbands, 126 children lost their fathers and the mine lost 25 per cent of its employees.

The explosions of the No. 1 Esplanade Mine are known as the worst mining disaster in British Columbia's history and second worst industrial accident in Canada (the mining disaster of 1914 in Hillcrest, Alberta killed 189 miners). A jury blamed the explosion on the firing of an unprepared and badly planted charge that ignited accumulated gas fuelled by coal dust.

To mark the anniversary and honour the memory of the lives lost, flags at City of Nanaimo facilities will be lowered to half-mast on Wednesday, May 3.

Visit the walk-through coalmine exhibit in the Nanaimo Museum to learn more about Nanaimo's coal mining history and this tragic accident. Find more information on this award-winning exhibit here:
www.nanaimomuseum.ca/permanent-exhibit/the-coal-mine.

Strategic Link: n/a

Key Points

- On May 3, 1887, 150 miners lost their lives to the worst mining disaster in BC history.
- Flags will fly at half mast on May 3 in memory of the lives lost in the No. 1 Esplanade Mine disaster.
- A memorial plaque to remember the miners who died from the explosions stands in place of the site of the No. 1 Esplanade mine on Milton Street (1151 Milton Street).

Quotes

"Please take a moment on May 3 to remember the many lives lost in this tragic event, an event that shaped our community's history and no single disaster killed a greater portion of our City's citizens."

Leonard Krog
Mayor
City of Nanaimo

Quick Facts

- In 2015, Council passed a resolution to lower the flags at all City of Nanaimo facilities to half-mast on May 3 in memory of the lives lost in the Nanaimo coal mining disaster of 1887.

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