

# 100-Plus Trapped Miners Freed In China 'Miracle'

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Xinhua News Agency/AP  
Rescued miners are carried to ambulances at the flooded Wangjialing Coal Mine in China's Shanxi Province.

More than 100 Chinese miners were pulled out alive Monday after being trapped for over a week in a flooded coal mine, where some ate sawdust and strapped themselves to the shafts' walls with their belts to avoid drowning while they slept.

Miners wrapped in blankets, some with their light-sensitive eyes covered but their feet bare, were hurried to waiting ambulances that sped wailing to nearby hospitals. One clapped on his stretcher and reached out his blackened hands to grasp those of rescuers on either side.



Ng Han Guan/AP  
A coal miner rescued from the Wangjialing Coal Mine in Xiangning county is rushed into a hospital in Hejing town.

Rescuers in tears hugged each other at the scene, which was broadcast live on national television. The sudden surge in rescues was a rare piece of good news for China's mining industry, the deadliest in the world. A rescue spokesman said 115 survivors had been pulled out as of 4:30 a.m. EDT.

"A miracle has finally happened," Liu Dezheng told reporters Monday morning, after the first nine miners were taken out shortly after midnight. "We believe that more miracles will happen."

Rescuers have been pumping water out of the flooded mine since last Sunday, when workers digging a tunnel broke into an old shaft filled with water. The first signs of life from underground came Friday, when tapping could be heard coming up the pipes. Divers first headed into the tunnels over the weekend but found high, murky water and emerged empty-handed.

As the water level continued to drop, rescuers with rubber rafts entered late Sunday and pulled out the first nine survivors just after midnight. Eleven hours later, the large wave of rescues began.

The miners had spent eight days underground and were soaked through. Some had hung from shaft walls by their belts for days to avoid falling into the water when asleep. Later, they climbed into a mining cart that floated by.

Liu Qiang, a medical officer involved in the rescue, said the survivors had hypothermia, severe dehydration and skin infections from being in the water so long. Some also were in shock and had low blood pressure.

"This is probably one of the most amazing rescues in the history of mining anywhere," said David Feickert, a coal mine safety adviser to the Chinese government.

A total of 153 workers had been trapped, and there was no word Monday afternoon on the status of the 39 miners still underground. Conditions remained complicated by high murky water.

Families of the survivors were thrilled. "He called and managed to say my sister's nickname, 'Xiaomi,' so we know it's really him and that he's alive," said Long Liming, who said he received a call around midday from his rescued brother-in-law Fu Ziyang.

A doctor then took the phone and said Fu had to rest, Long said. "He was trapped underground for so long, so he's very weak. But we are very relieved to know that he made it out safely."

Officials said most of the rescued miners were in stable condition, but state television said seven were in serious condition.

In a sign of government concerns over possible social unrest, family members of the trapped miners said they have been kept under close watch in hotels and are not allowed to leave unless accompanied by minders.

The first rescue early Monday morning had seemed beyond hope for days before crews finally heard tapping from deep underground Friday.

Rescuers then scrambled to understand the complicated situation underground and send down packages of glucose, milk and letters of encouragement. One read: "Dear fellow workers, the Party Central Committee, the State Council and the whole nation have been concerned for your safety all the time.... You must have confidence and hold on to the last!"

Some workers appeared to be trapped on upper platforms of the mine; their access to the entrance of the V-shaped shaft was blocked by an area swamped with water.

"The situation underground was a bit more complicated than we predicted," Luo Lin, the director of the State Administration for Work Safety, told state television.

It was unclear Monday how deep into the mine the rescued workers had been found.

"The miners in the lowest levels will be in the most extreme danger," Feickert said. "Just think of a tall building, with people on different floors, if that suddenly filled up with water."

China Central Television said one of the newly rescued workers still was holding his mining lamp.

A preliminary investigation last week found that the mine's managers ignored water leaks before the accident, the State Administration of Work Safety said.

China's coal mines are the world's deadliest. Accidents killed 2,631 coal miners in China last year, down from 6,995 deaths in 2002, the most dangerous year on record, according to the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety.

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