

Maria Danilova

17 killed in two mining accidents in Ukraine

A blast at one coal mine in eastern Ukraine and an elevator collapse at another killed at least 17 people and injured 11 on Friday, officials said. Nine miners are still missing following the blast.

The twin accidents in eastern mining regions shocked the country and highlighted the persistent dangers of the local mining industry, believed to be one of the world's most dangerous because of outdated equipment and widespread disregard for safety regulations.

Rescuers were looking for nine miners missing after a powerful pre-dawn blast at the Suhodilska-Eastern mine in the Luhansk region that killed 16 workers and injured three others. Regional authorities suspect the accident was caused by a powerful explosion of methane, the Luhansk regional administration said in a statement.

The blast hit the mine shortly before 2 a.m. Friday at a depth of 915 metres when miners were working the night shift.

Mykhailo Volynets, the head of the Independent Trade Union of Miners, called that mine "one of the most dangerous in Ukraine" due to buildups of methane and coal dust.

Hours after the blast, an accident hit another mine in eastern Ukraine. An elevator used to transport miners and equipment into and out of the Bazhanova mine in the eastern Donetsk region collapsed, killing one worker and injuring eight others. Scores of other miners were trying to leave through emergency exits and pathways, Emergency Situations Ministry spokeswoman Yulia Yershova told the Associated Press.

Senior government officials arrived Friday morning at the mine hit by the explosion and were working to establish the cause of the accident. President Viktor Yanukovich was also expected to fly to the site later in the day, according to his office.

Mr. Volynets said that 70 per cent of the equipment at Ukrainian mines is outdated and urgently needs replacement.