Memo

To: Sago Investigation File

From: Celeste Monforton

Re: Interviews about SCSRs with Miners Who Escaped the Sago Mine Explosion

State and Federal investigators interviewed 15 miners from the Sago mine who commented about their experience using the CSE Corporation’s SR-100 self-contained self-rescuers. The following summarizes the testimony from these interviews with respect to the devices, including their experience donning and breathing through them, their observations of other miners using the devices, and their SCSR training. In sum, seven of the 15 men used their SCSRs during their escape from the Sago mine. Two of the seven men explained their own personal difficulty using the device. Several miners also described problems experienced by a third miner, but this individual did not personally report these difficulties.

A. Surviving Sago Miners who DID NOT don their SCSRs

Eight of the 15 miners interviewed did NOT don their SCSRs after the explosion occurred. Some reported that they “just didn’t feel like they needed it,” or “I didn’t smell any smoke.” Others indicated that they were holding it in reserve, not knowing what they might encounter during their escape. One said, “I was thinking, I guess, maybe save it in case I needed it at a later point.” A few admitted, “we should have probably put them on.”

Of these eight miners, several, but not all, were asked if they heard that other miners had problems using the device. Four were not aware of any trouble, responding “not that I know of” or similar statements. One miner said, “I did hear a couple of comments after we were in the intake that they weren’t working. They (unidentified) couldn’t breathe with them on...[and] a couple comments that these GD things aren’t working...they didn’t state as to why, just said they were having trouble breathing with them on.”

B. Surviving Sago Miners who DONNED their SCSRs

Of the seven miners who donned their SCSRs, five reported that the devices worked as they expected. They did not report any problems assembling the device, donning it or using it. One of the miners commented about the unit getting warm and said that this meant the unit was working. He said he heard another miner (unidentified) who complained that the device got warm and perhaps didn’t expect that to happen.

1 Avington, J.Boni, P.Boni, Carpenter, Grall, Helmick, Tenney, and Jones.
2 Tenney
Mr. Eric Hess reported that two miners\(^3\) had “a little bit of trouble getting their rescuers on” and indicated that he and Alton Wamsley helped them “get strapped on, get ready to go” and then “proceeded down the track.” One of these men, Mr. Harley Joe Ryan, reported difficulty using the device (see below.)

**Hoy Keith’s Experience**

Several miners\(^4\) indicated that Mr. Hoy Keith had trouble putting on his device and wondered whether the unit worked properly. Mr. Hess said that Hoy Keith’s unit wasn’t “working the way it should, but he still had it on.” Mr. Wamsley reported that Hoy Keith’s device “didn’t activate…we tried and tried and tried, and it wouldn’t.” When asked if Mr. Keith tried blowing into the device to activate it, Wamsley said, “No, I don’t even know if he had enough wind to do that.” Wamsley reported that Keith was never able to use his SCSR.  

\[CM Note: the transcript account suggests Mr. Keith’s mouthpiece was inserted before the rip cord was pulled. In order for the device to work properly, the rip cord must be pulled first, and then the mouthpiece inserted.\]

Mr. Gary Rowan also described what he observed with Mr. Hoy Keith and the SCSR. “I don’t know if it was that [the device] or just, he was, you know, pretty panicked and stuff. I know he had said he had a cold and stuff and he didn’t have his air…He said he wasn’t sure that his was working or not. But I’m thinking it may have just been him.”

Mr. Hoy Keith confirmed that he received some assistance donning the device from his fellow miners, but when asked if the SCSR functioned as intended, he said “yes, sir.” When asked if it was easier to breathe once he was using the SR-100, he stated, “I can’t say it was because I had so much of that dust and stuff in my lungs…You couldn’t hardly breathe. When I did get the fresh air, the guy gave me his water jug, and I rinsed my mouth out some, and that helped a lot.”

**Arnett Roger Perry’s Experience**

Mr. Perry said that he didn’t have any trouble donning the device, but noted that it didn’t initially work for him. “I was sucking the bag together, I was breathing so hard because I’m short-winded and I was sucking that bag up in until it…collapsed. So I breathed into it and blew it way out.” He then reports taking the unit in and out of his mouth. “Every little bit, I was taking it out because I wasn’t getting enough air it seemed like. So I would take it out and then and put it right back in.” Mr. Harley Joe Ryan observed Mr. Perry using his SCSR, saying he “got it open, got the bag and everything out, he got it in his mouth, put his nose clips on, I activated it, the bag blew wide open. Within a block, the bag collapsed.” [Note: transcript account suggests Mr. Perry had his mouthpiece and noseclips on before the rip cord was pulled. In order for the device to work properly, the rip cord must be pulled first, and then the mouthpiece inserted.] “He couldn’t breathe. He had to take it out of his mouth. And I tried to

\(^3\) Ryan and Anderson  
\(^4\) Rowan, Hess, Wamsley, Perry
get him to leave it in his mouth and just breathe with what he could get, but he said he couldn’t breathe, so he took it off…”

The investigator probed him about whether he activated the unit, Mr. Perry didn’t remember pulling the rip cord, only remembers pulling out the mouthpiece plug. He eventually said, “I suppose it worked all right…but it was uncomfortable. The goggles, I tried them on and they smashed my eyes so I turned them down.”

Mr. Perry also reported “we’ve been more or less told that these rescuers last one hour…now, whether this type of rescuer was like that or not, but I thought I was breathing fine and I thought, well, I might have to walk out of here. I keep hearing them telling me it takes two hours to walk out of here. So what I’m doing is saving mine, and trying to go as far as I can…that’s all I could remember, one hour…I was going to try to ration it.” (emphasis added)

**Harley Joe Ryan’s Experience**

Mr. Ryan reported having trouble getting the canister open and receiving assistance from Mr. Wamsley to open it. He described having trouble getting the bottom part off the canister, saying “they were not worth a damn…there’s going to have to be some design changes for them. In a panic situation, when you reach down to grab the tab, you cannot get a hold of it. It’s hard to get a hold of. It’s not long enough or it’s not wide enough…We had to jerk it two or three times to get it to unseal.” He said that he was unable to open the canister because he was “panicked…scared…more panicked I think than anything else due to the fact that I just thought everybody is leaving us, and I was trying to get Doc (Anderson) down out of there and he was—Doc was a little worse off than I was.”

“I wasn’t asking this thing [SCSR] for more than what I was getting out of it. If I would have been on my own and moving, no, I would have took it off and throwed the thing away because it would have just quit. It would start to get warm. So every time it would start to get warm, I’d slow me and Roger [Perry] down….because the thing was overriding what was left in it. And I would rather breathe what it was giving me than the air that was out there.” When asked if the SCSR every quit, Mr. Ryan said, “no, it did not,” and he reported leaving the device in his mouth until reaching fresh air.

Mr. Ryan also reported having trouble breathing with it in his mouth because he doesn’t have any teeth. “You can’t clamp that thing—and that’s another design flaw…I’m going to do some screaming about it, but not now. You can’t hold something in your mouth if you don’t have teeth…what they’re going to do to about that, I don’t know….I had trouble keeping it in, but I kept it in. You had to clamp on it.”

**C. Training on SCSRs**

Most of the miners interviewed could generally describe the SCSR training received, and recalled using the training model to take the SR-100 out of the case and prepare the device for donning it. One miner noted that the instructor showed him how to assemble the device, but didn’t put the SCSR on himself, others remember having to go through all the steps to assemble
the SCSR (except putting in the mouthpiece) before the instructor would sign their training form. Others reported “you do everything except for putting in the mouthpiece.”

Importantly, at least two of the miners commented that SCSR training should be done more frequently. Mr. Ron Grall said “That's something that needs to be done a little bit more frequent, in my opinion. Because once a year, you forget. I mean, because once a year, you kind of forget that stuff.” Mr. Arnett Roger Perry said, “I think they ought to have more training using them because you forget…if you don’t use something, you forget how.” Notably, Mr. Harley Joe Ryan said, “we’ve heard it so many times, we could do it in our sleep. But then, when you have to do it, it’s a different---it’s really, really [different.]”

A number of other miners working at Sago (although not on the day of the explosion) were interviewed as part of the State and Federal investigations. Several of them commented on their training, in particular, their knowledge of SCSRs. Mr. Rockie Starkey, for example, a roof bolter with 4 ½ years of mining experience, said that the trainer demonstrated "how to take it out of the canister...put the apparatus in your mouth and pull it to activate." Mr. Starkey’s testimony suggests that he has not been trained adequately on the proper sequence of steps for donning the device. A miner is supposed to activate the unit first (i.e., pull the orange rip cord) and then insert the mouth piece.