Lack of Oxygen Killed Four



Two British Columbia workers and two paramedics who tried to help them all died very quickly from a lack of oxygen, according to coroner Bruce Chamberlayne. But the reason why a formerly safe area would turn deadly hasn’t been stated.

The chain-reaction incident occurred at a decommissioned mine in southeastern BC in May. A contractor who had gone to the former lead/zinc mine to test water was the first to succumb to a total lack of oxygen.

A second worker discovered the contractor inside a hut and was able to make a 911 call before collapsing. Two ambulance attendants who responded also perished.

“They would have simply gone unconscious very quickly and they really would not have known what happened to them,” said Chamberlayne.

The oxygen level in the hut was close to zero percent. In normal circumstances it is 21 percent. Originally it was thought that the victims may have died from exposure to toxic gas, but investigation ruled that out.

While the cause of death is known, Fred Hermann, British Columbia’s chief inspector of mines, is still trying to determine why an atmosphere that was safe for years became oxygen deficient. The Sullivan Mine operated for more than nine decades before shutting down in 2001. In its heyday it employed more than 2,000 workers.