

MINE SEARCH FOR WYOMING CO. MAN HITS DEAD END LEAVING FAMILY WITHOUT CLOSURE

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BOONE COUNTY, W.Va (WOAY) - The search for Wes Blackburn was back on Wednesday. Blackburn, a Wyoming County native, has been missing since November and is suspected to be inside an abandoned Blackhawk coal mine in Boone County. Authorities said, back in November, they suspected he and two others were there to steal copper.

On Wednesday, after almost ten months since their first failed rescue mission, crews went back in with no success, even though they tried a different entrance. West Virginia's Director of Miners' Health, Safety and Training Eugene Smith lead the search.

"There was evidence with the first entrance when we went in in November that people were going under roof falls, they had traveled under - We don't do that. We're not gonna travel under roof falls, so there's evidence that maybe somebody was in there," Smith said. " And then family members have also indicated that they've been in the mines and if he's anywhere it's in that area where they couldn't get because of roof falls, so we're going to be in the middle of areas where we've already been."

While the 25-member team was working to break through the mine's seal and enter, just a couple miles down the road stood Blackburn's mother, Joanne Short, waiting and hoping like she has been since November.



"It's been murder, actually," Short said. "I keep it marked on the calendar every day. Today makes 284 days. If it wasn't for some of my family and the people at work, I'd go crazy."

Also waiting at the Wharton-Barrett Volunteer Fire Department was Amanda Pennington who was one of the two people at the mine with Blackburn. She says she was asleep in the car and was under the influence when Blackburn went back in. Although her memory is hazy and she was arrested for conspiracy to break and enter when she woke back up, she, like the rest of his family, believes it is very possible Blackburn was murdered.

"There's a lot that don't add up," Pennington said. "He knew what he was doing. He's a miner. He's a coal miner. He does it for a living. He wouldn't have done anything dangerous to himself. He would've came out of there if something hadn't happened to him."

A little after noon, Eugene White came back with news from the rescue crews saying they hit a solid wall of coal and earth and deemed it unsafe to proceed.

"We've tried everything we can to enter this coal mine safely and every option is - We're through. We just can't do it," Smith said.

This was not the closure that Short or the rest of her family had hoped for, but because of her love for him and her faith, she says she is not giving up on her son.

"Because I know God's gonna bring him home. I know he is, no matter what. I know God's going to bring him home. I trust the good Lord above. I know he is. Because the Bible says, if you have the faith of a mustard seed and tell this mountain to move, it shall move."

Mine officials did tell the family that at this time, they will no longer be going into that mine to conduct searches.