

Line Rescue Team Offers Students Hands-On Training

TIM CROSBY



A low rumble shakes the shaft, then the lights flicker and die as dust particles thickly fill the air. You're in the middle of an emergency, deep underground in a coal mine. Maybe it's a collapse, or maybe it's a fire. Or maybe it's a medical emergency, and your stricken coworker is in an area that is difficult to access. No matter how you slice it, you're hoping that help will come. A team of students in the Department of Mining and Mineral Resources Engineering at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

is learning how to help in such a situation – and gaining knowledge at the same time that will help make the students better mining engineers. The Rescue Dawgs, SIU's mine rescue team, is part of a registered student organization known as the Saluki Miners. It formed when mining engineering students became interested in learning more about mining safety and rescue, says Justin Bollini, a senior in mining engineering from Alton. "We decided that a mine rescue team would be the perfect blend of classroom knowledge

and hands-on learning," Bollini says. "Since we are a collegiate team, we cannot be mobilized in the event of an emergency. But once a student graduates and joins a company or state mine rescue team, then that student can be called to actual emergencies. "Our program trains students to be able to join a company or state team without the need to be trained by the state or company team from scratch, which can take up to two years." The Rescue Dawgs are believed to be the first college mine rescue team in Illinois. The team began training at events last year, using

mine simulation and firefighting training center at Rend Lake College.

Since then, the team has spent time widely acquiring equipment donated from local underground mines. Bollini says the professional miners and mining companies in the area have been strong supporters of the team's efforts.

"Mining is a very tight-knit field, and companies have been very helpful with supplying us with equipment in order to help train," Bollini says. "Mining companies are very interested in helping produce safety-oriented mining engineers here at SIU."

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He hopes others will contribute as well. "We are always looking for monetary equipment donors to help sponsor our team for trainings, contests and equipment," he says.

Being part of the team also means that, once students such as Bollini graduate, they will have experience showing they are safe, dependable applicants because of the health, safety and mine rescue experience they received at SIU.

"Mining engineering students take safety very seriously, and we all strive to learn as much as possible about safety practices, both in school and during internships," Bollini says. "We believed that a mine rescue team would be a great hands-on way to

learn about safety practices and emergency management focused on the mining field."

The 12 members of the team receive training in many areas that are critical to mine safety, Bollini says.

"For instance: Learning to take gas readings, which test air quality levels underground, is a top team priority," he says. "Since gases settle to different heights due to differences in specific gravities, students often relate what they learned in chemistry to gases encountered in mines and their properties."

The team also works on finding different ways to re-establish ventilation in a mine, should it be lost due to an accident. Mine ventilation is a major subject in mining engineering, but being on the rescue team gives students an opportunity for practical application.

"This is of paramount importance in underground mine rescue scenarios," Bollini says.

Students also are well-versed in mine environmental health and safety rules and regulations at the state and federal levels. Such knowledge comes directly to bear in mine emergencies, Bollini says, adding: "The list is endless on ways we tie in our classroom knowledge to the skills we learn and practice with the team."

Bollini says team members strive to share their knowledge and skills with the public at every opportunity to demonstrate the care and professionalism within the mining industry.

"Mining can be viewed negatively by the public, and we hope to help show that mining is not only a safe and environmentally conscious field, but that



the mining community is also a very good steward to the local economy," he says. "It supplies thousands of well-paying jobs to the Illinois economy."

This spring, seven members of the team will compete against mine rescue teams from other colleges and universities at the Eastern Collegiate Mine Rescue Contest at West Virginia University, located in Morgantown, West Virginia.

More information and updates about the SIU Mine Rescue Team is available on Facebook. Search [@SIUminerescue](#) for updates.