

## Specialized Training Gives Rescue Team Life-saving Skills

In a coal town like Partizansk, a city of 60,000 nestled in the foothills of Russia's far eastern Primorsky Krai, a skilled emergency response network is an absolute necessity for the region's miners who labor day in and day out to keep the once-thriving industry afloat and eke out a meager living for themselves and their families. Dangerous under the best of circumstances, mining in the region—and throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia—is plagued by financial constraints that have seemingly made safety issues an afterthought. For the Partizansk Military Mountain Rescue Team, this makes rescue missions following a collapse, explosion, or other accident at one of the area's working mines a top priority.

"Our work is very dangerous," admits Alexander Nechunayev, leader of the mobile unit of the Partizansk Team. "We risk our lives each time we respond to a call and so, when we are on duty, we must be at a constant state of alert." Members are also commonly called to the scene of fires—especially when people are trapped. "We are used to working under conditions fraught with noxious gasses or heavy smoke and we have special respirators that allow us to breathe as we work to get people out to safety," he explains.

"We originally had 10 units, but with fewer mines operating these days the industry cannot support that many," states the 26-year veteran of underground rescue operations. "So, now there are three teams who cover Siberia and the Far East," he continues, explaining that each of these teams consists of a lead person, a driver, and four rescue specialists. The units work 36-hour shifts—24 of those hours are on-duty and the remaining half-day is spent on rigorous

training exercises conducted both in the mines and above ground. "During the training sessions, we work to upgrade our skills on various rescue, recovery, and salvage equipment. We also play out different scenarios so we are well-prepared for whatever we might be faced with when we respond to an emergency call."

In addition to their rescue capabilities, members of the mobile unit are also experienced emergency medics. Respiratory spe-



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Partizansk Military Mountain Rescue Team leader Alexander Nechunayev and respiratory specialists Gennady Klimov and Sergey Andreev are regularly called to the scene of mine explosions, fires, and other disaster situations. They have all taken specialized emergency medicine courses at the Vladivostok EMS Training Center.

cialist Gennady Klimov—a team member since 1986—explains that they have all trained at the Vladivostok EMSTC, which was created through AIHA's now-graduated Vladivostok/Richmond partnership. They hone their skills with monthly refresher courses—sometimes at the Training Center, other times locally. "We've all become much more adept at setting broken bones, performing CPR, intubating victims, applying tourniquets, and many other first aid procedures," Klimov notes.

It was this unique combination of EMS and rescue skills that prompted the emergency dispatcher to call Nechunayev's unit to the scene of a terrible accident that left Evgeny Skorenko trapped in his car, impaled to the seat by a length of steel pipe. "In Mr. Skorenko's case, the situation was described to us before hand, so we knew

In addition to training in general emergent care—spinal immobilization and cardiac resuscitation, for example—AIHA's Emergency Medical Services Training Centers (EMSTCs) also offer classes targeted to the needs of their individual communities. In Vladivostok, Russia, for example, specialized courses teach members of the Partizansk Military Mountain Rescue Teams various techniques they can use when they are called to a disaster at one of the region's many coal mines. This is the story of one team who used their skills to help save a man impaled by a metal pipe; the story of the man they helped is on the other side.

exactly what equipment we should bring," Nechunayev states, pointing out, "Our objective was to get him out, but of course we wanted to cause him the least pain and additional trauma as possible."

As the Rescue Team worked using hydraulic metal-cutters to first remove the seat, then slice through the metal pipe that protruded from Skorenko's stomach, the ambulance crew administered intravenous painkillers and did their best to distract the injured man. They finally succeeded in freeing him and he was rushed to the hospital.

"This accident was horrible but, in the mines, the injuries we see are even more serious," Nechunayev concludes, noting that working above ground was almost calm in comparison to the bedlam that exists when a mine shaft collapses on dozens of men. "We responded to a mine explosion recently. Many miners were injured—four severely—and one man was killed. We were working in the stifling dust and darkness, trying to get them out and the fear that there might be another explosion was always there in the back of our minds. But, we did our job then just as we did when we helped Mr. Skorenko. Hope is the last thing to die, and we hope all of the people we work on live."

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