

Mine will be flooded tomb

□ Blast barrier will also destroy any probe evidence

HALIFAX (CP) — Water will seal the tombs of 11 miners killed by an underground explosion at the Westray colliery — and perhaps damage evidence into the disaster.

The Nova Scotia government gave the coal company permission on Tuesday to pump tonnes of water into the deep shafts of its gutted mine in Plymouth, about 130 kilometres northeast of Halifax.

"Our officials tell me that's really the best explosion-proof barrier they can have... it's the water," said Labor Minister Leroy Legere.

"Everyone agrees we have to stabilize the atmosphere down in the mine just to prevent further major explosions that might occur."

A month ago, a coal-dust blast ignited by methane ripped through the mine, killing 26 miners. The bodies of 15 were brought out before the unstable tunnels forced officials to abandon the search.

The powerful blast destroyed the mine's ventilation system and as dangerous gases collected, mine owner Curragh Inc. sought to seal the shafts with a steel-and-concrete barrier about 1,000 metres down the main shaft. The

proposal called for a barrier through which men and machinery could pass.

The Toronto-based company ditched that plan after two recent rockfalls and gas-monitoring indicated it would be too hazardous.

Critics have said flooding would eradicate evidence needed for an RCMP probe and an inquiry headed by Justice Peter Richard.

Liberal member Bernie Boudreau, an opponent of Westray long before the explosion, said he wanted to be assured that RCMP and Richard believe the measure is necessary.

"Not necessary to assist the quick rehabilitation of the mine, but necessary from a safety point of view so that no further people are put at risk," said Boudreau.

"If they are prepared to give their consent to it, then I guess it's just going to be a regrettable action that has to be taken."

Legere said the flooding proposal, submitted Saturday by Westray, was reviewed by RCMP and inquiry officials and there were no objections.

Richard later said "flooding of the blast area in the mine will render the further accumulation of evidence improbable, and will likely prevent any attempt to remove the bodies of the deceased miners still in the mine."

But he said flooding was the only practical and safe way to stabilize the the blast area.

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Keegstra trial to hear prof

RED DEER (CP) — A Jewish university professor was expected to take the stand today in the trial of Jim Keegstra.

Keegstra, charged with wilfully promoting hatred against Jews, is being tried in Red Deer Court of Queen's Bench before a judge and a 12-person jury.

The Crown has called University of Calgary professor Eliezer Segal as an expert witness in their case against Keegstra.

The trial resumed Monday, after a four-day adjournment to allow Keegstra and the Crown to look over some paperwork.

Details of Monday's session cannot be reported because the jury had been excused from the courtroom. They returned Tuesday morning, the 50th day of the trial, to hear Keegstra and the Crown test Segal's qualifications as an expert witness. Keegstra is representing himself in the trial.

Crown lawyers Steve Koval and George Combe called Segal, a professor of religious studies, based on his expertise in the Talmud, Jewish culture, Jewish religion and Judaism.

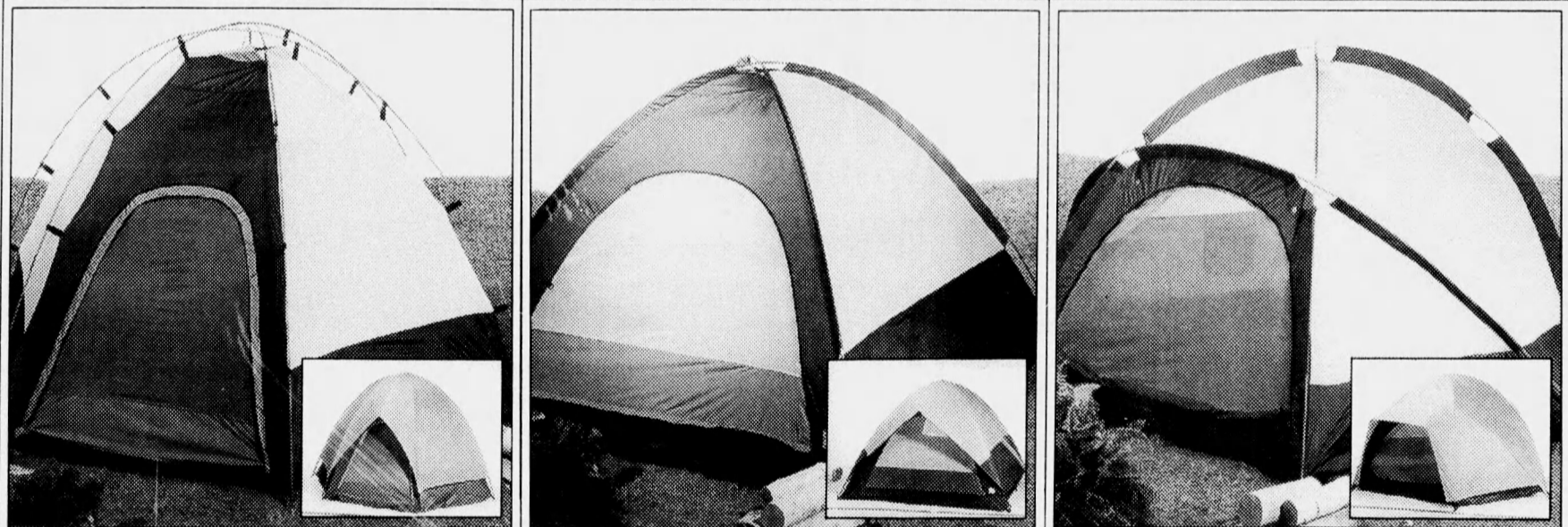
Born in Montreal of Jewish parents, Segal, 42, did undergraduate work in Jewish studies and philosophy at McGill University. He later moved to Israel, where he wrote his masters and doctoral theses on elements of the Talmud.

Segal's studies and research include extensive studies of the Hebrew Bible. He is the last witness in the Crown's case, which included testimony from some of Keegstra's students, as well as from Robert David, formerly Lacombe's school superintendent.

Keegstra, 57, is alleged to have promoted hatred at Eckville high school.

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