

7 Dam Workers

Trapped by Fire In Drainage Bore

Six employes of Six Companies and an inspector from the bureau of reclamation narrowly escaped death by asphyxiation yesterday morning when fire broke out in the tunnel in which they were working deep in the bowels of the earth 150 feet below the bottom of Boulder dam.

The seven men, "Chick" Bostrom, Bill Stovall, Alex Kuslof, Jack Moore, Ben Godby, Ben Vaughn and Inspector Lewis, were at work grouting, pumping and lining the end of the drainage tunnel which leads from a point out under the Colorado river to a shaft which in turn connects with diversion tunnel number two on the Nevada side, when fire broke out in the top of the tunnel, cutting off their only means of escape.

Frank Backman and Bert Choate, in charge of work in the tunnel area, stated this morning that it was their belief that the small electric heater in the change shack short-circuited, causing the shack to catch fire.

The air blower, which furnishes fresh air to the workmen, was incapacitated, and operators were unable to get to the hoist which controls the small elevator to the tunnel. The seven men remained in the choking fumes and gases for nearly three hours before they could be rescued. None were hospitalized. When they reached the top, all were choking and gasping for air, and all were on the verge of collapse.

The fire department of Six Companies Inc. was rushed to the scene from Boulder City when it was discovered that the blaze could not be put out by ordinary means and when timbering at the mouth of the access shaft caught fire. Water, poured from the fire hose, drenched all the trapped workmen, and flooded the base of the shaft. The change shack at the head of the shaft, and in the tunnel adit, had been constructed there in order that men working in the damp and muddy area might change their clothes while on duty.

The shaft in which the men were working leads from the construction adit to the upper Nevada penstock system. From the base of the shaft a tunnel was constructed nearly to the Arizona shore of the Colorado river, under the river bed. The purpose of the tunnel was to drain this area during construction.

The tunnel has been completely lined with concrete, and pumps have been placed at its Nevada end to keep the area dry. The bureau of reclamation will place stress-meters in the area, to tabulate the stress of the lower section of the Boulder dam.