

Search keyword ...

[Viet Nam News](#) > [English Through the News](#)

Awful suffering as floods hit Quang Ninh

Update: September, 06/2015 - 12:00



People who live near the coal mines in Quang Ninh have experienced some terrible suffering because of a flood.

They have lost their homes and have had to move to new places.

It must have been a terrible shock for them because the river that flooded was only a small, clear stream.

Suddenly it became a powerful, flooding river that was dirty with things from the coal mine.



Residents clean up in Mong Duong Ward, Cam Pha City, in northern Quang Ninh Province. Heavy rains, floods and tonnes of mine sludge claimed 17 lives and caused millions of dollars worth of damage in the coal mining province. - VNS Photos
Truong Vi

Chi Lan

CAM PHA CITY, QUANG NINH (VNS) — Wiping sweat from his **forehead**, 36-year-old Trinh Duc

Sang took big strides along a road covered with muddy coal **sludge** and dirt to the place that was his home until just three weeks ago. He climbed a **rickety** ladder that **buckled** under his weight to reach his neighbour's house overlooking a **creek**. From there, he crossed into his old home.

Sang was, until three weeks ago, a coal miner in Cam Pha City, one of the four cities in the northern province of Quang Ninh, a region known for its coal mines, harbours and ports. Both he and his friend were **aware** that everyone living beside the creek in Mong Duong ward would have to move out.

The 94 families in this small community are being **relocated** following an **unprecedented landslide and flooding**.

Seventeen people elsewhere in the province died in the floods which caused damage estimated at more than VND2.7 trillion (US\$124 million).

As Sang and his friend watched, two women slowly carried large sacks over their shoulders along the stream near them. The sacks contained the last moveable **possessions** from their old homes. Until the floods, the stream was one metre in depth - and its waters were crystal clear. Now, the water was dirty and filled with mud and rocks. It barely reached to the women's ankles.

The mountain of soil and rocks from the **open-cut** coal mine could be seen in the distance. Its sides had been **ominously etched** with deep gutters carved deeply into its **flanks** by the **torrential rain**. They seemed to be running directly downwards to the stream and houses below.

Although Sang also wanted to bring his possessions to his newly **rented** house, kindly paid for by local authorities, he could not afford to do so. The door to his old house was half buried under mud and rocks.

Many houses directly in the path of the swollen stream of mud and water were washed away in just a few minutes. Others, like Sang's, were left with broken doors and half buried furniture.

When the rain stopped, the mud gradually began to dry, a new ground surface at least one metre higher than before. Just around the corner from Sang's house, three children from families that still hung on to their **wrecked homes**, were jumping and running around in rooms half filled with rocks and soil. They could now touch the ceilings, which were **formerly** three metres above the floor.

"Everyone was caught **off guard**. This type of landslide had never ever happened before," said Sang.

He was able to save his most **valuable assets** by moving them onto the bed before fleeing with his family. Forty-one-year-old Tran Ngoc Quan in neighbouring Quang Hanh Ward had no such luck.

The **high water mark** was still **visible** high on the walls of his house, in which a broken TV, a refrigerator and water-soaked bed and wardrobe were scattered around an altar to his late father. "If no one came over, I would have died I was so exhausted," Quan said.

Garden gone

The morning after the flood, Quan sat on the highest chair in his house, looking at where his garden used to be. He also realised that his deer, pheasants and chickens in his backyard barn must have

drowned. Once his most valuable assets, he bought them with a **loan** from the local bank.

Now Quan was left with a bank **debt** of VND35 million (\$1,600) that he had no way of paying off with his monthly wage of about VND5 million (\$230) and a family of five to feed.

Like Sang and many others, Quan had not been prepared for anything like this. "My house sat next to a stream, so I felt **assured** that even if the worst flood happened, I would be safe," Quan said.

None of the coal mining companies in the region were prepared for such heavy rain. All of the **traditional coal mines** in Cam Pha City, particularly in Quang Hanh and Mong Duong Wards, were severely flooded. Their operations are still **paralysed** three weeks after the **devastating** event.

"Although we carried out all anti-flooding plans approved by the authorities at the beginning of the year, this time the flooding **exceeded our expectations**," said Quang Hanh Coal Company's vice-chief of staff, Mai Quang Duong.

The floodwater in most of the company's mines should be free of water by the end of this month, while the worst affected mines owned by the Mong Duong Company are expected to take at least two months, according to the representatives from both companies. "It should take another two or three months to recover operations," said Mong Duong Coal Co. Labour Union Chairman Tran Quang Canh.

Damage to coal mines and loss of production caused by the flooding is estimated to be about VND1.2 trillion (\$55 million).

Sang was one of nearly 1,000 mine workers at the Mong Duong company who **temporarily** lost their jobs **due to** the flooding. However, he will receive a total of VND1.7 million (\$78) from the company to help him.

Sang knows for sure that his family will have no new-year-money **bonus** to celebrate the Tet holiday next year. While much of Sang's concern is about how to look after his family and whether he should move to another house closer to his sons' school, the coal companies and the local authorities had much bigger problems to worry about.

Is another big rain coming this year? Will the soil dump above Sang's old neighbour-hood, or any other dumps, be made safe in time?

"We have been carrying out **advanced measures** to prevent bigger flooding, but another big rain and our mines will be **doomed**," said Mong Duong company chief of staff Vu Ngoc Xuan.

The landslide that occurred on the **artificial mountain** built up by Cao Son and Coc Sau open-cut coal mines was the biggest disaster since the mines opened 40 years ago. It is not likely to be the last.

In July 2006, thousands of cubic metres of soil were washed down the residential area No 12 in Cam Pha's Cua Ong Ward. There were no **casualties** reported, but six of the 15 houses in the community were destroyed. In the dozen or so mines around Cam Pha City, about 70 million of cubic metres of waste soil is dumped each year. Many other dumps, such as those at Nam Den Nai, Nam Lo Phong,

9/20/2016 Awful suffering as floods hit Quang Ninh - English Through the News - Vietnam News | Politics, Business, Economy, Society, Life, Sports - VietNam News
waste can be dumped each year. Many other dumps, such as those at Nam Boi Han, Nam Lo Hong, Nui Beo and Ha Tu, are expanding closer and closer to residential areas, posing a real danger to the people's lives should the rain bucket down again.

"We are particularly concerned about the landslide risks in Quang Ninh," said Agriculture and Rural Development Deputy Minister Hoang Van Thang. "Provincial authorities should look into the issue now."

Yet, apart from the decision to shift many residents **permanently**, no other words have been heard from the authorities on how to tackle the landslide issue.

The coal industry is said to be the **backbone of Quang Ninh's economic development**, accounting for about 45 per cent, or more than VND60 trillion (\$2.7 billion) of the provincial budget in the last five year. The expansion of the industry brought about the development of the province, but it seems that there is now a price pay.

Cam Pha City is exposed to Ha Long Bay on one side and to the open-cut coal mines on the other. According to Xuan, this means there are no other places to dump the mining waste.

"The spare land is all used up," he said. "It's over". — VNS

GLOSSARY

Wiping sweat from his **forehead**, 36-year-old Trinh Duc Sang took big strides along a road covered with muddy coal **sludge** and dirt to the place that was his home until just three weeks ago.

*Your **forehead** is the part of your head between your eyes and your hair.*

***Sludge** is mud made from things that come out of mines and factories, as well as soil and water.*

He climbed a **rickety** ladder that **buckled** under his weight to reach his neighbour's house overlooking a **creek**.

*A **rickety** ladder is one that is almost broken.*

*If a ladder **buckled**, it collapsed.*