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Five Miners Confirmed Dead Following Collapse at Chilean Copper Mine

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SANTIAGO, Chile – The bodies of all five miners who had been trapped underground for three days in Chile's El Teniente copper mine have been recovered, authorities confirmed Saturday. The final victim, Moises Pavez, was located at approximately 3:30 p.m. local time after extensive drilling through debris by rescue crews.

The miners became trapped Thursday after a magnitude 4.2 earthquake triggered a structural collapse deep within the El Teniente facility, the world's largest underground copper mine. The incident, which also left one miner dead and nine others injured, prompted an immediate suspension of operations in the affected area.

Aquiles Cubillos, the chief prosecutor for the O’Higgins region, confirmed the recovery and identification of all five bodies. “We deeply regret this outcome,” Cubillos stated during a press briefing. A criminal investigation has been launched to determine whether any violations of safety regulations contributed to the disaster.

The miners’ location had been detected through Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, but search teams were unable to establish direct communication. Over the past 72 hours, emergency crews worked through dense rock layers in hopes of reaching the trapped individuals in time.

State-owned mining giant Corporación Nacional del Cobre de Chile (Codelco), which operates the El Teniente site, temporarily evacuated over 3,000 personnel from the broader facility following the collapse. A planned presentation of Codelco’s first-half financial results, scheduled for Friday, was canceled in light of the ongoing rescue mission.

Chile’s National Geology and Mining Service is now examining whether the tremor was purely natural or potentially triggered by underground mining activity. The region lies within the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” an area known for frequent seismic activity.

The tragedy has drawn renewed scrutiny over the safety protocols at Chile’s copper mines, which form the backbone of the nation’s economy. Chile remains the world’s top copper producer, and El Teniente alone plays a critical role in meeting global demand for the metal, which is used in electrical wiring, construction, and renewable energy systems.

The current investigation follows a history of high-profile mining incidents in the country. In 2010, Chile famously rescued 33 miners from the San José mine after they survived underground for 69 days, a story that captured international attention and was later adapted into a major motion picture.

Though Chilean mining operations are generally regarded as technologically advanced, this latest incident raises concerns about infrastructure resilience in earthquake-prone regions. The outcome underscores the ongoing need for rigorous oversight and strict adherence to safety standards in one of the world’s most vital and hazardous industries.