



Chile

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Rescued Chilean Miner Has Silicosis

SANTIAGO – Yonni Barrios, one of the 33 men who survived 70 days trapped at the bottom of a mine in northern Chile, says he has been diagnosed with silicosis, a respiratory illness common among miners.

“In the exams performed on me at the Chilean Safety Association it emerged that I have silicosis,” the 51-year-old veteran of three decades in the mines told Las Ultimas Noticias newspaper.

“I am at the age when they detect silicosis. As it’s a progressive illness, with luck you make it to retirement and then you die,” said Barrios, who served as the medic for his 32 colleagues during their ordeal last year.

Amid the glare of media attention on the trapped miners and their dramatic rescue last October, Barrios’ personal life became a favorite theme of the tabloid press when his wife and his mistress encountered each other outside the mine.

Barrios, who still sees a psychologist twice a week to deal with the after-effects of the trauma in the mine, now earns a living by running a small shop with wife Susana Valenzuela from their home in the city of Copiapo.

The miner attributes the lingering emotional distress to the demands of his role as medic.

“I had a lot of responsibility and so I had to bear up, to avoid any feeling, to avoid the others’ seeing me flag,” Barrios told the newspaper.

Her husband’s silicosis “was to be expected,” Susana says. “My dad has it, the majority of the miners have it.”

Medicine can offer no cure for silicosis, a disease caused by the inhalation of silica dust. The condition typically afflicts people who work in mines, quarries, construction and some kinds of manufacturing.