



May 24, 2008 - Summary of a Non-Fatal Surge-Pile Accident, at Cobra Mining's Black Bear Preparation Plant, Logan County, West Virginia

The surge piles at Cobra Mining's Black Bear Preparation Plant are located against a highwall and are fed by trucks. There are four feeders drawing coal onto the draw-off tunnel conveyor belt. On Saturday, the 24th of May, a bulldozer was pushing coal on the surge pile when the control room discovered the #4 feeder had quit feeding coal to the belt. The operator was notified by radio that a void had developed over the feeder. He used his remote to stop the feeder and headed toward the feeder to fix the void. He began pushing coal to the left of the feeder, but didn't have any success. Moving to the right, he began pushing more coal trying to locate the void. At approximately 10:15 AM, the dozer lost traction and began to sink. He called the control room and told them he was stuck and was starting to sink. As the coal began breaking up and falling into the void the dozer slid sideways and turned, heading backwards into the hole. The dozer didn't fall into the hole as much as it just sank as the coal slid out from under it, finally stopping with the blade straight up. Coal covered most of the dozer but the side door was not covered and after 45 minutes, the operator was lifted out of the hole by a rope ladder and harness dropped down by an excavator's boom.

The dozer was supplied with the strengthened glass, SCSR's, duplicate radios, remote feeder shutoffs, and light sticks as required by West Virginia's Surge Pile requirements. (This incident was eerily similar to another entrapment at this operation over the same feeder. See March 6, 2002 Summary.)