



February 12, 2002 - Non-fatal Surge-Pile Accident at Savage Coal Terminal, near Price, Utah.

The accident occurred when a D9N Caterpillar bulldozer fell approximately 45 feet into a hidden cavity. The clean coal pile was approximately 50 feet high. The dozer ended up in a vertical position with the blade pointing upward. The operator had been pushing coal to a feeder, and was crossing the pile to push from the other side. The operator was rescued after being trapped for six hours.

Both front door windows broke, as well as the rear window, and coal entered the cab. But fortunately, the coal choked itself off and didn't entirely fill the cab. The windshield was badly cracked and deformed but held. The operator actually tunneled through the coal and climbed out of the cab to a point where he was underneath the blade. From there he was rescued when a ladder was lowered by a crane to him and he was pulled to safety. The operator was fortunate to have survived with only a cut to the back of his head and bruising of his back.

The accident occurred at 3:30 am, and the temperature was 19 degrees Fahrenheit. The cab windows were laminated glass, approximately 0.24 inches thick, held in place by rubber gaskets. The glass was not high-strength glass, it was the normal type provided in dozer cabs. The dozer's CB radio did not operate during the rescue. The wire had been pulled off the antenna when the dozer fell into the cavity.

There was a mis-communication on the status of the No. 5 feeder. The dozer operator did not understand that the No. 5 feeder had been turned on. The coal over the No. 5 feeder had bridged over, and when the operator trammed over it, the coal gave way.

After the accident, the company made a number of improvements to their surge pile safety plan including: use of high-strength glass and in some cases reinforcing/strengthening existing cab windows, equipping dozer cabs with SCSRs and secondary lighting (chemical type), signal light systems over feeders, additional radios, a process/procedure to verify whether or not a draw hole develops every time a feeder is activated, improved communication procedures, and miner hazard-awareness training programs.