



April 30, 2002 - Non-injury surge-pile accident at Cannelton Industries' Mine No. 130, West Virginia.

The accident occurred at 11:00 am when a D9N Caterpillar bulldozer fell into a hidden cavity in a raw coal pile. The pile was 45 to 50 feet high and only had two feeders. When the accident occurred, the dozer operator's job was to push coal to the feeder that was operating, and to move coal away from the stacker tube on the side of the pile where the feeder was not operating. Reportedly, the dozer operator was not sure which feeder had been activated. From his position on the pile, he could see the area above one feeder, but he could not see the area above the other. When he saw that no drawhole had developed over the feeder he could see, he assumed that the other feeder had been activated. In fact, he saw no drawhole because the coal had bridged over the active feeder. When the operator trammed over it, the dozer broke through and fell into the cavity. It ended up with the blade still at the top level of the pile and with the rest of the dozer pointing upward at a steep angle.

A witness saw the dozer go into the pile, and the dozer operator was able to radio that he had gone into a cavity. The rear of the cab was damaged when the dozer hit in the cavity and some of the steel support bars for the rear window were deformed. A D10 dozer dug out the trapped dozer and the operator was rescued in about one and a half-hours. He was not injured. The dozer involved in the accident was a Caterpillar D9N, with the cab equipped with a "submarine" package. This consists of support bars on the insides of all the cab windows and the use of laminated, chemically strengthened glass. (Note that the glass used with the "submarine" package is chemically treated, and is stronger than ordinary glass. However, it is not nearly as strong as the PPG product (Herculite II) that is used in Caterpillar's "Ultra-Strength 40" dozer-glass kit.) The dozer was also equipped with two radios (one CB and one FM), and two self-contained self-rescuers. An overhead red ball marked the location of each feeder, and there were lights to indicate which feeder was active.

Improvements made to the surge pile safety program included adding a requirement to check every time a feeder is activated, to ensure that coal is feeding. If coal is not feeding, the foreman is to be contacted immediately. A requirement was also added that the person energizing the feeder must communicate to the dozer operator and the operator must acknowledge which feeder is turned on. All miners were re-trained on surge pile safety.