

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

Surface  
(Coal)

Machinery Accident Fatality Report  
May 20, 2026

Boyd Company (C1571)  
Louisville, Kentucky

at

Combs Branch Job  
Pine Branch Mining LLC  
Hazard, Perry County, Kentucky  
ID No. 15-16883

Accident Investigator

Jeffrey Brock  
Mine Safety and Health Inspector

Originating Office  
Mine Safety and Health Administration  
Barbourville District  
3837 S. U.S. Hwy. 25E  
Barbourville, Kentucky 40906  
Samuel Creasy, District Manager

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## OVERVIEW

On May 20, 2026, at 10:21 a.m., Preston Pollard, a 25-year-old contract mechanic field technician with 1 year of mining experience, was fatally injured when the counterweight he was removing from a front-end loader fell on him.

The accident occurred because: 1) the counterweight was not blocked against motion prior to performing repairs, and 2) training was inadequate for the engine and radiator guard removal.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Pine Branch Mining LLC owns and operates the Combs Branch Job, a surface coal mine near Hazard, Perry County, Kentucky. Coal is mined from the Hazard 5a, 7, 8, 9 and 10 seams. The mine employs 22 miners and operates one active loader pit. The mine operates two 11-hour production shifts and two 12-hour maintenance shifts, 5 days per week. Trucks transport the coal to the Kentucky River load-out where it is processed and loaded onto rail cars.

Pine Branch Mining LLC contracted Boyd Company to replace the engine and radiator of a 992G front-end loader. Pollard was employed by Boyd Company.

The principal management officials at the Combs Branch Job at the time of the accident were:

Patrick Schoolcraft  
Charles Everidge  
Michael Day

Safety Director  
Superintendent  
Foreman

The principal management official for Boyd Company at the time of the accident was:

James Callahan

Service Manager

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) completed the last regular safety and health inspection at the Combs Branch Job on January 20, 2026. The 2025 nonfatal days lost incidence rate for the Combs Branch Job was zero, compared to the national average of 0.87 for mines of the same type.

#### DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT

On May 20, 2026, Devin Adams, contract mechanic field technician for Boyd Company, arrived on the mine site at 7:00 a.m. Pollard arrived at 7:30 a.m. Pollard and Adams started work on the Caterpillar 992G front-end loader, which was located at the Billy Goat High Dump. James Callahan, service manager for Boyd Company, assigned Pollard and Adams to replace the engine and components of the front-end loader.

Pollard positioned his mechanic truck at the rear of the front-end loader and connected chains to the radiator guard and the boom cable. Pollard began removing the radiator guard and told Adams that he was moving underneath the front-end loader to remove the bolts necessary to remove the radiator guard. Pollard removed 15 bolts. While attempting to remove the 16<sup>th</sup> and final bolt, Pollard told Adams that he was having trouble removing the bolt. Adams gave Pollard a different socket and Pollard continued working to remove the bolt. Adams told Pollard that it appeared that the radiator was lifting and that Pollard should let tension off the boom. Pollard let the pressure off the boom by using a wireless remote control which was located on his mechanic truck. Pollard continued trying to remove the bolt. Adams returned to the front-end loader's engine compartment to finish removing hoses and mounts. At 10:21 a.m., Adams felt the front-end loader move and heard a loud noise. Adams yelled to Pollard asking if he was "okay," but there was no response from Pollard. Adams looked to his left and noticed that the front-end loader's counterweight had fallen. Adams jumped off the front-end loader's frame to check on Pollard and determined that Pollard was located beneath the counterweight. Adams went to his mechanic truck, located approximately 30 feet away from the front-end loader, and used the Citizens Band (CB) radio to call for assistance and request that someone call 911.

Adams returned to the front-end loader to check on Pollard, and there was still no response. Adams attempted to call Callahan and Gary Bolen, field service supervisor for Boyd Company, via cell phone. Neither answered his call. Adams returned to his truck and used the CB radio to confirm that help was on the way and that 911 had been contacted but did not receive a response. Adams called Callahan again, via cell phone, and advised him of the accident and requested that he travel to the site as soon as possible.

William Watts and Quenton Thomas, mechanic/oiler/mine emergency technicians (MET), heard Adams' call for help over the CB radio and began their response. At 10:25 a.m., Watts arrived at the scene and checked Pollard for a pulse but did not detect one. Watts recognized that Adams was distraught and possibly in shock, so Watts assessed Adams' condition, then returned to check for Pollard's pulse and again found none.

At 10:25 a.m., Thomas, via CB radio, directed Christopher Elsey, grader operator, to go to the mine entrance, wait on Emergency Management Services (EMS) to arrive, and escort them to the accident scene. Thomas also contacted Michael Day, foreman, via cell phone. Day called 911 at 10:25 a.m. Thomas arrived at the scene at 10:27 a.m. and checked Pollard's pulse but did not detect one.

At 10:28 a.m., Day notified Harvey Whitaker, maintenance chief, and Charles Everidge, superintendent, of the accident. Whitaker and Everidge proceeded to the accident scene. Whitaker called Brian Morgan, boom truck operator, via cell phone, and instructed Morgan to bring a boom truck to the scene. At 10:35 a.m., Day arrived at the scene and was met by Watts and Thomas. At 10:45 a.m., Perry County Ambulance Authority, Inc. arrived and began their assessment of Pollard and detected no vital signs.

At 11:00 a.m., Morgan arrived at the scene with a boom truck. Whitaker and Everidge arrived at the scene at 11:12 a.m. Morgan, Everidge, Whitaker, Watts, and Thomas lifted the counterweight with chains and cables using the boom truck, stabilized the counterweight with cribbing, and removed Pollard from underneath. Aaron Smith, Perry County deputy coroner, arrived at the scene and pronounced Pollard deceased at 11:29 a.m.

## INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT

On May 20, 2026, at 10:26 a.m., Patrick Schoolcraft, safety director, called the Department of Labor National Contact Center (DOLNCC). The DOLNCC contacted Renee Hinkle, office assistant, who contacted James Proffitt, assistant district manager. Proffitt notified Marshall Sizemore, supervisory mine safety and health inspector, and Jeffrey Brock, mine safety and health inspector, and sent them to the mine site. Proffitt assigned Brock as the lead accident investigator. Proffitt also notified Samuel Creasy, district manager, and Brian Napier, supervisory mine safety and health inspector.

At 11:40 a.m., Sizemore and Brock arrived at the mine. At 11:45 a.m., Brock issued an order under the provisions of Section 103(k) of the Mine Act to ensure the safety of the miners and preservation of evidence. Proffitt, Napier, and Creasy also traveled to the mine.

MSHA's accident investigator conducted an examination of the accident scene, interviewed miners and mine management, and reviewed the conditions and work procedures relevant to the accident. For reference, a list of persons who participated in the investigation can be found in Appendix A.

## DISCUSSION

### Location of the Accident

The accident occurred at the Billy Goat High Dump.

### Weather

The weather at the time of the accident was fair with clear skies and 76 degrees Fahrenheit. The investigator determined that weather did not contribute to the accident.

### Equipment Involved

The equipment involved in the accident was a Caterpillar 992G front-end loader, Company No. 2061. Sixteen M24-3 x 80 mm bolts secured the counterweight to the front-end loader. The counterweight weighed approximately 16,000 pounds and contained the fuel cell. Due to the on-going repair of the front-end loader, a complete examination of the equipment was not conducted. The investigator determined that the functionality of the equipment did not contribute to the accident.

The mechanic truck that was connected to the radiator guard was a Western Star service truck, Company No. 1348. For reference, a sketch of the configuration of the front-end loader and mechanic truck from after the accident is shown in Appendix B.

### Examinations

Day conducted an on-shift examination on the day of the accident and did not identify any hazards. The investigator determined that the examination was adequate and did not contribute to the accident.

### Work Procedures

Boyd Company's established work procedures required mechanic field technicians to review and follow the manufacturer's service manuals and the Service Information System (SIS) for safe repair procedures. The equipment manufacturer's recommended maintenance procedures and SIS were not followed during the engine and radiator guard removal on the front-end loader, when a field technician removed the bolts used to secure the front-end loader's counterweight, causing the counterweight to fall. Per the manufacturer's service manual procedures and SIS, these bolts were not to be removed during the removal of the radiator guard. The manufacturer's service manual titled "Disassembly and Assembly-854G Wheel Tractor and 992G Wheel Loader Engine Supplement" provides step-by-step instructions for the disassembly and removal of the radiator guard. These instructions state, "Remove bolts (30) from four radiator mounting brackets." A photograph which clearly indicated the location of these bolts is provided in the manual. For reference, this photo can be found in Appendix C. The instructions also state, "Attach a suitable lifting device to radiator guard (31). The weight of the radiator guard (31) is approximately 1,670 kg (3,680 lbs.)." The investigator determined that the contractor did not block the counterweight against motion, which contributed to the accident.

### Training and Experience

Pollard had 1 year of mining experience, all with Boyd Company as a mechanic field technician. Pollard was employed with Boyd Company for approximately 6 years, performing maintenance

on Caterpillar equipment. Pollard received site-specific hazard awareness training for the Combs Branch Job on April 24, 2026. Pollard received annual refresher training on December 15, 2025. The annual refresher training included training on the Surface Mobile Equipment Program which covered hazard awareness, blocking against motion, and following maintenance procedures.

Boyd Company's annual refresher section of their approved training plan, dated January 27, 2021, provided a training matrix. The matrix outlines the following topics, "Subject - Maintenance and Repair," "Objectives - To develop knowledge in the proper way to perform routine maintenance on the equipment. Greasing, oil change, tire change, etc." This section of the approved plan did not adequately address major repairs where significant hazards may exist or refer their mechanics to SIS to ensure the equipment manufacturer's recommended maintenance procedures were followed. The investigator determined that the training provided on the procedures for the engine and radiator guard removal was inadequate, which contributed to the accident.

### ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

The accident investigator conducted an analysis to identify the underlying causes of the accident. The investigator identified the following root causes, and the contractor implemented the corresponding corrective actions to prevent a recurrence.

1. Root Cause: The contractor did not block the counterweight against motion prior to performing the repair.

Corrective Action: Boyd introduced a comprehensive Pre-Task Planning (PTP) process to strengthen task planning, hazard recognition, and risk mitigation before work begins. Mechanic technicians are expected to review applicable technical documentation and testing requirements before beginning a task. This expectation is reinforced on the PTP form through the "D&A" (Disassembly & Assembly) checkbox, which prompts the mechanic technician to verify that this review has been completed. A checked D&A box indicates that the mechanic technician has reviewed the available documentation and understands the applicable procedures and requirements before starting work.

The PTP is documented on a reusable form that is updated as work conditions, scope, or hazards change throughout the task. Mechanics are required to identify specific hazards associated with the task and document the controls that will be implemented to reduce risk before work begins. The PTP process has been formally established as a company Standard Operating Procedure and is mandatory for all technicians across every Boyd division.

2. Root Cause: The contractor did not provide adequate training for the engine and radiator guard removal.

Corrective Actions: Boyd introduced a comprehensive Pre-Task Planning (PTP) process to strengthen task planning, hazard recognition, and risk mitigation before work begins. The contractor has provided training on the PTP process. Additionally, all Boyd employees

maintain stop-work authority and are empowered to halt work at any time if conditions become unsafe or if uncertainty exists regarding a task or process.

### CONCLUSION

On May 20, 2026, at 10:21 a.m., Preston Pollard, a 25-year-old contract mechanic field technician with 1 year of mining experience, was fatally injured when the counterweight he was removing from a front-end loader fell on him.

The accident occurred because: 1) the counterweight was not blocked against motion prior to performing repairs, and 2) training was inadequate for the engine and radiator guard removal.

Approved By:

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Samuel Creasy  
District Manager

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Date

## ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

1. A 103(k) order was issued to Pine Branch Mining LLC.

A fatal accident occurred on May 20, 2026, at 10:21 a.m. This order is being issued under the authority of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, under Section 103(k) to insure the safety of all persons at the mine, and requires the operator to obtain the approval of an authorized representative of MSHA of any plan to recover any person in the mine or to recover the mine or affected area. This order prohibits any activity in the affected area. The operator is reminded of the obligation to preserve all evidence that would aid in investigating the cause or causes of the accident in accordance with 30 CFR 50.12.

2. A 104(a) citation was issued to Boyd Company for a violation of 30 CFR 77.404(c).

On May 20, 2026, a contract mechanic field technician was fatally injured when the counterweight he was removing from a 992G Caterpillar front-end loader fell on him. The contractor did not block the counterweight against motion prior to performing the repair.

3. A 104(a) citation was issued to Boyd Company for a violation of 30 CFR 48.28(b)(1).

On May 20, 2026, a contract mechanic field technician was fatally injured when the counterweight he was removing from a 992G Caterpillar front-end loader fell on him. The contractor did not provide adequate training for the engine and radiator guard removal.

## APPENDIX A – Persons Participating in the Investigation

### Boyd Company

James Callahan  
Gary Bolen  
Devin Adams

Service Manager  
Field Service Supervisor  
Mechanic Field Technician

### Pine Branch Mining LLC

Patrick Schoolcraft  
Charles Everidge  
Michael Day  
Harvey Whitaker  
Quenton Thomas  
William Watts  
Christopher Elsey  
Brian Morgan

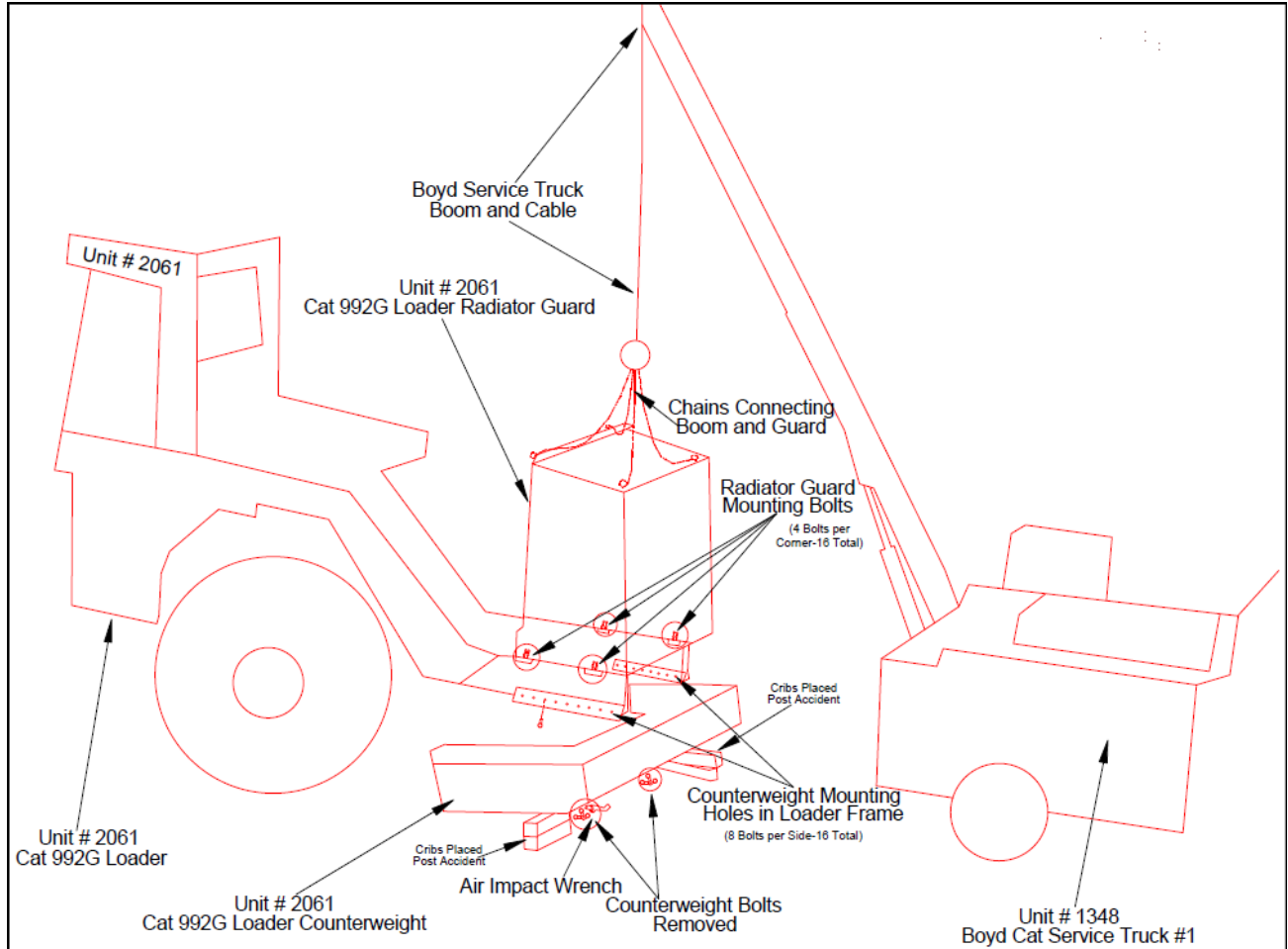
Safety Director  
Superintendent  
Foreman  
Maintenance Chief  
Mechanic/Oiler/MET  
Mechanic/Oiler/MET  
Grader Operator  
Boom Truck Operator

### Mine Safety and Health Administration

Samuel Creasy  
James Proffitt  
Brian Napier  
Marshall Sizemore  
Jeffrey Brock

District Manager  
Assistant District Manager  
Supervisory Mine Safety and Health Inspector  
Supervisory Mine Safety and Health Inspector  
Mine Safety and Health Inspector

## APPENDIX B – Post Accident Sketch



APPENDIX C – Service Manual Photograph

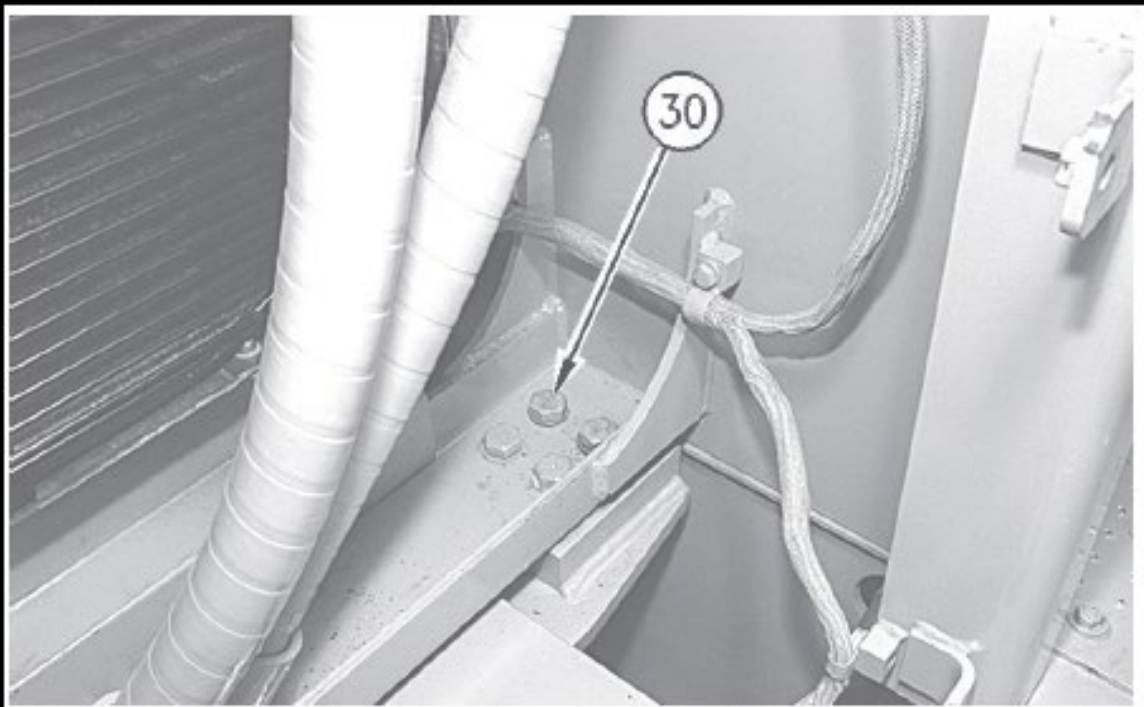


Illustration 163

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**29. Remove bolts (30) from four radiator mounting brackets.**