

omission constituted a breach of the duty of candor to the tribunal." KCP&L officials could not be reached for comment.

**Industry**

**Consol idles Loveridge mine, moves equipment to Robinson Run**

Consol Energy has temporarily idled its Loveridge mine No. 22 near Fairview, WV and is moving the mine's longwall mining equipment to its Robinson Run mine near Shinnston, WV.

"Although the demand for coal currently is strong, it requires a number of months to prepare a new section for mining," said Consol Vice President Thomas F. Hoffman. "Before we make that investment, we want to carefully evaluate the long-term market prospects."

Loveridge reopened a year ago after being closed following a June 1999 fire. This year, it produced 1.1 million tons of coal. The idling at Loveridge resulted in the layoff of 110 workers July 20. "Loveridge employees and mine rescue personnel worked hard, under challenging conditions, to restore the mine's infrastructure and ventilation system. As a result, we were able to accomplish our goal of mining the already developed coal at Loveridge and recovering the equipment," Hoffman said.

The idling of Loveridge was anticipated and had been announced earlier by Consol in relation to maximizing available output after an assessment was made of the mine's status after the fire. Movement of the Loveridge equipment to Robinson Run will facilitate increasing production at Robinson Run from 6 million to 7 million tons per year. The increased production at Robinson Run will be used to supply American Electric Power under a recently announced deal between Consol and AEP.

**MSHA faults ventilation system in Willow Creek fire**

An explosion and fire at the Willow Creek mine in Utah in July 2000 was caused by an inadequate ventilation system. The accident resulted in the deaths of two workers and injuries to eight others. The mine, operated by RAG American Coal, was sealed in August 2000 and has not been reopened.

In a July 17 statement which accompanied the release of an investigative report, the federal Mine Safety & Health Administration (MSHA) said that "investigators determined that the ventilation system at Willow Creek did not adequately dilute concentrations of explosive methane gas which was ignited in a series of explosions within a 30-minute period."

In the report itself, MSHA staff said: "Several factors

adversely impacted the bleeder ventilation system prior to the accident. An increase of coal production on the longwall face and an expanding gob resulted in greater methane liberation into the gob...Although vertical degasification boreholes were drilled for the panel, the first vertical degasification borehole had not yet been encountered. In addition the mine ventilation and bleeder system had limited reserve capacity and the availability of ventilation pressure and air quantity was further reduced by the intake air split adjacent to the D seam bleeders."

MSHA noted that the immediate cause of the accident was likely the ignition of methane gas caused by falling rock in the worked-out longwall panel of the mine, although the agency said that falling rock in a worked-out mine section is a normal and "expected" occurrence.

A fire had occurred at Willow Creek in November 1998 during retreat of the mine's initial longwall panel. All miners were evacuated safely and recovery efforts continued through November 1999 when the facility was reopened.

Mining resumed until the July 2000 explosion and fire. The mine was purchased by RAG American Coal from Cyprus Amax in June 1999.

Simultaneously with the release of the report, MSHA issued citations to RAG American Coal related to ventilation failures, according to an agency spokesperson. The company has the right to challenge the citations, or if it accepts the citations it can still challenge the amount of any financial penalty imposed by MSHA. RAG spokesman Mike Rounds said the company was studying the report, but noted, "We made all the changes that MSHA required after the first fire, and we even went beyond that." He added that the rock characteristics at Willow Creek were unique to that mine and were not present in any other RAG property.

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