

Report of Fatality
Longwall Face Equipment
September 28, 2024

ACI Tygart Valley
Leer Mine
Permit No. U00200406A
Near Grafton in Taylor County, WV

Region I Office
14 Commerce Drive Ste 1
Westover, WV 26501
Edward Peddicord, Inspector-At-Large

Table of Contents

Photos	1-3
CAD Drawing.....	4
Timeline	5-6
General Information	6-7
Description	7-8
Findings of Fact	8-10
Conclusion	10
Enforcement Action	10
Acknowledgement	10
Victim Information	11
Mine Information	12

Photos



Photo of the accident scene at 10 Left Longwall Face.

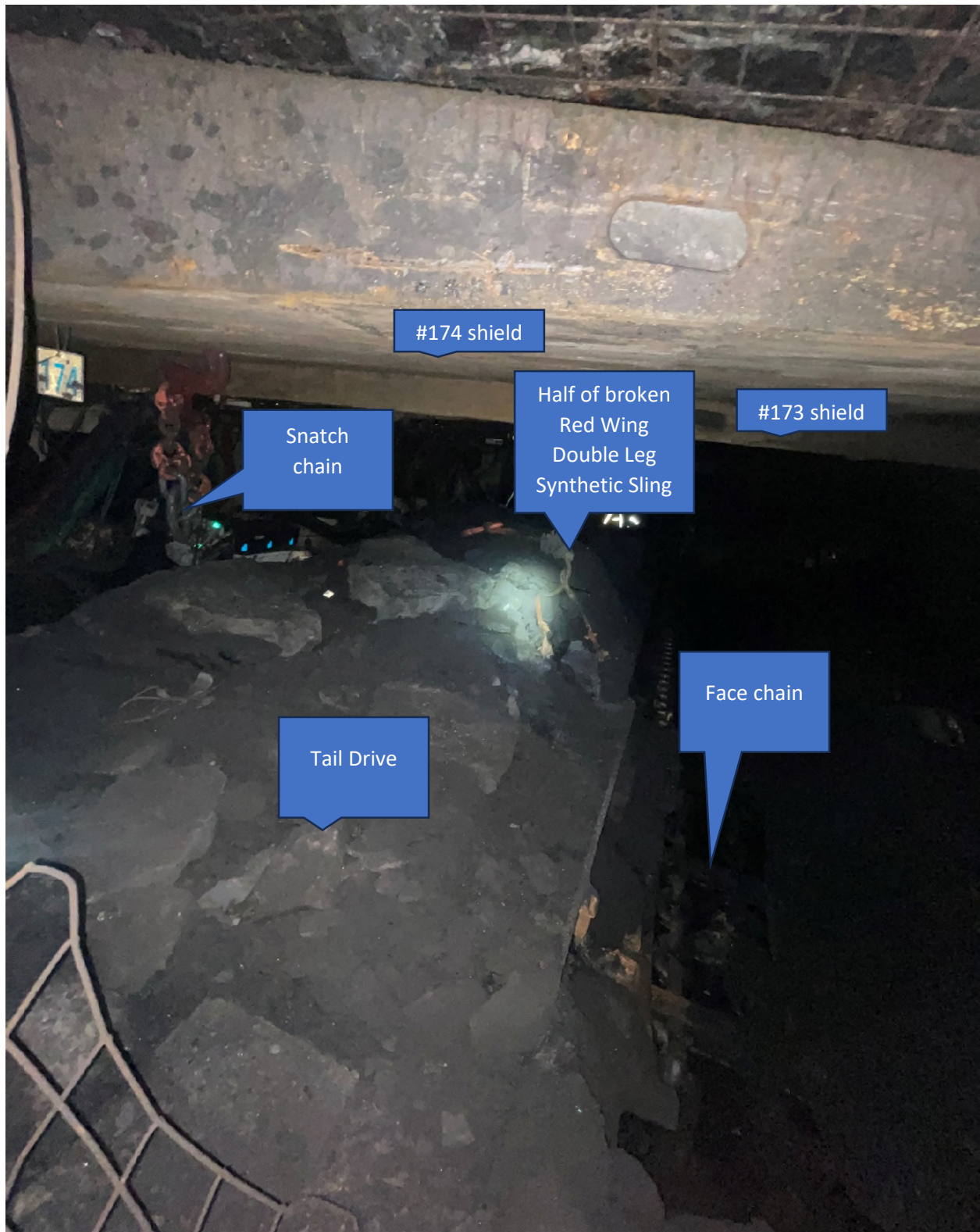













Photo of the accident scene at 10 Left Longwall Face.



Photo of the accident scene at 10 Left Longwall Face.

Timeline

-  9:00 p.m., September 27, 2024, Colton Walls and fellow crew members prepared for the start of the midnight shift.
-  11:26 p.m. Mr. Walls and fellow crew members entered the mine.
-  12:04 a.m., September 28, 2024, Mr. Walls and the midnight crew arrived on 10 Left Longwall Face section.
-  12:20 a.m. Mr. Walls and Mr. Travis Knotts, maintenance, met with the previous shift and finished mining to the head drive to prepare for the maintenance work
-  7:30 a.m. When the maintenance work was completed, Mr. Walls and Mr. Knotts started mining towards the tail.
-  7:49 a.m. Mr. Walls advanced the #173 shield while standing at the #172 shield.
-  7:50 a.m. The Red Wing Double Leg Synthetic Sling that attached the #173 and #172 shields exceeded its length and weight capacity, resulting in the coupling ring and the hook dislodging from the #172 shield and striking Mr. Walls.
-  7:50 a.m. Mr. Knotts heard a loud noise and stopped mining. He looked towards the tail and saw Mr. Walls laying against the shields, on the mine floor.
-  7:52 a.m. Mr. Knotts went to aid Mr. Walls. Once at Mr. Walls' location, he found Mr. Walls was severely injured and called for help.
-  7:53 a.m. The midnight crew members heard the call for help on the radio and started to the tail drive to help provide first aid.
-  7:56 a.m. Jeff Underwood, the mine dispatcher, called Taylor County 911.

- 8:00 a.m. The dayshift longwall crew was redirected to the tailgate of the 10 Left Longwall Face section to help aid and transport Mr. Walls from the tail drive to the waiting mantrip.
- 8:05 a.m. The dayshift longwall crew arrived at the tail drive and Mr. Walls location.
- 8:09 a.m. Taylor County EMS arrived at the mine portal to receive Mr. Walls.
- 8:13 a.m. Mr. Walls was transported to the diesel mantrip and started toward the mine elevator.
- 8:40 a.m. Mr. Walls arrived at the mine elevator and was transported onto the elevator.
- 8:41 a.m. Mr. Walls arrived on the surface and care was transferred to Taylor County EMS.
- 8:42 a.m. Mr. Walls' care was transferred from Taylor County EMS to Health Net.
- 9:20 a.m. Health Net traveled from Leer Mine to J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital.
- 9:38 a.m. Health Net arrived at J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital.
- October 4th, 2024, Mr. Walls succumbed to his injuries.

NOTE: All times listed above are approximate

General Information

ACI Tygart Valley, Leer Mine, Permit No. U00200406A, is located near Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia. The Leer Mine produces 30,000 raw tons per day and annual production year to date is 5,223,919 raw tons from six (6) miner units and one (1) longwall. The coal is transported from the working sections by conveyor belts to the slope belt and then by overland belts to the preparation plant. The Leer Mine employs five-hundred and seventy-two (572) personnel and operates three (3) shifts per day. Day and afternoon are coal producing shifts, while maintenance is conducted on the midnight shift. The Lower Kittanning coal seam is accessed by the ACI Tygart

Valley, Leer Mine shaft and slope portals. The Leer Mine utilizes diesel/battery track mounted and rubber-tired battery powered haulage equipment.

On September 28, 2024, at approximately 7:52 a.m., Colton W. Walls, 34 years of age, was found unconscious from the injuries received while he was working the midnight shift on the 10 Left Longwall Face at shield #171. Mr. Walls was an employee of the Leer Mine.

On September 28, 2024, at 7:56 a.m. Jeff Underwood, Dispatcher, called 911 for assistance. At 8:00 a.m., the West Virginia Division of Homeland Security Mine and Industrial Accident Rapid Response System was notified of the accident. At 8:08 a.m., Tadd Rankin, Assistant Inspector-at-Large of the Region One West Virginia Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training, was notified that an accident had occurred at the Leer Mine. Mr. Rankin then notified Allen Nestor and Chris Ray, District Mine Inspectors, and James Bowman, Electrical Inspector, about the accident. Mr. Ray issued a verbal order at 8:35 a.m., to Marvin Cochran, Mine Superintendent of the Leer Mine. Mr. Rankin, Mr. Nestor, Mr. Ray and Mr. Bowman all responded to the Leer Mine. A joint investigation with the Mine Safety and Health Administration, ACI Tygart Valley, Leer Mine and WVOMHS&T began immediately.

Description

The longwall midnight shift weekend maintenance crew's normal shift is from 9:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m. On September 28, 2024, Mr. Derek Born, Mr. Dan Sloan, Mr. Colton Walls, Mr. Travis Knotts, and Mr. Dakota Dixon went underground to relieve the afternoon longwall crew. They arrived on the 10 Left Longwall section at 12:06 a.m. Once on the longwall section, they went to the longwall face to relieve the afternoon shift. They met the crew approximately mid-face, at the shear. Mr. Walls and Mr. Knotts mined the rest of the pass, towards the head and set the shear up for service. The midnight crew's main job is maintenance.

After completing the maintenance assignments, the crew prepared to produce coal by utilizing the longwall system. The crew started mining at approximately 7:30 a.m., with Mr. Knotts operating the shear and Mr. Walls operating the shields. The longwall shields are operated in automation mode from the #15 the #159 shields. The shields located at the head drive and tail drive are operated in manual mode. Once at the tail drive, Mr. Walls manually operated the shields. The #174 shield was attached to the #173 shield with a $\frac{3}{4}$ " double leg snatch chain and the #172 shield was attached to the #173 shield with a Red Wing double leg synthetic sling.

During the operation of the tailgate shields, Mr. Walls advanced the #173 shield twenty-four inches ahead of the #172 shield, exceeding the length and weight capacity of the supplied Red Wing double leg synthetic sling, resulting in the Red Wing double leg synthetic sling breaking and allowing the coupling ring and hook to dislodge, striking Mr. Walls. Mr. Knotts was operating the shear and stated he heard a loud noise and thought a shear pin had broken.

Mr. Knotts shut the shear down and saw Mr. Walls laying across #172 shield and on #171 shield. Mr. Knotts traveled to Mr. Walls and found him unconscious and severely bleeding from the back of his head. Mr. Knotts started first aid and called for help. The remainder of the midnight shift longwall crew heard the call for help and started toward the tail drive. When they arrived, they assisted in first aid.

The dayshift longwall crew had just passed the 9-left switch when the dispatcher notified them of the accident and instructed them to travel back to and into the 9-left section, which is the tailgate of the 10-left longwall section. The dayshift arrived at the tail drive of the longwall to assist in first aid and the transportation of Mr. Walls outby in the tailgate entry to the waiting rail mantrip and transported him to the mine bottom.

Upon arriving at the mine bottom mantrip station, the miners transported Mr. Walls to the surface using the mine elevator, EMS services were waiting on the surface and took over care of Mr. Walls. EMS services transported Mr. Walls to the waiting Health Net helicopter. Health Net took over care for Mr. Walls and he was transported by medical helicopter to Ruby Memorial Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries on October 4, 2024.

Findings of Fact

1. Mr. Walls was an employee of ACI Tygart Valley, Leer Mine for seven (7) years and four (4) months, with a total mining experience of fourteen (14) years and seven (7) months. His job classification was Longwall Electrician.
2. Mr. Walls possessed a WVOMHS&T Underground Coal Miner's Certification Number 1-18108 received on July 27, 2010.
3. Mr. Walls possessed a WVOMHS&T WV Electrician Certification Number 1-1834 received on October 17, 2018.
4. Mr. Walls received task training for the shield operator March 15, 2024.
5. Mr. Walls worked 3 days a week, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 p.m. until 9:00 a.m., which are 12-hour shifts.
6. Mr. Walls received annual miner retraining on January 30, 2024.
7. Mr. Knotts possessed a WVOMHS&T Underground Coal Miner's Certification Number 1-26143 received on April 8, 2024.
8. Mr. Knotts was an employee of ACI Tygart Valley, Leer Mine. He had four months of experience at the Leer Mine.
9. Mr. Knotts received task training for the Joy Shear on October 29, 2024.
10. The Joy Shear model number is 07LS0ID.
11. The Joy Shield model number is 502926292.
12. This model shield has a ram stroke of 46.9 inches.
13. The Red Wing double leg synthetic sling involved in the accident is sold by Red Wing Company, Inc.

14. The synthetic rope diameter is $\frac{3}{4}$ " and is manufactured by X-Trema Line.
15. The Red Wing double leg synthetic sling is designed as a double leg sling with two slip hooks and coupling ring.
16. The slip hooks weigh 23.8 lbs., and the coupling ring weighs 18.2 lbs.
17. The tag attached to the rope depicts use of Red Wing double leg synthetic sling at a 60-degree angle and 30-degree angle, not a straight-line pull.
18. Per the manufacturer's information sheet, the $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter rope is rated 10.9 tons when used vertically with at break rating of 31.7 tons, when attached in a grommet style.
19. Rope fibers were found at the accident scene under the #172 shield and #173 shield.
20. The hook and coupler from the damaged Red Wing double leg synthetic sling were found at the victim's location, under the #172 shield canopy.
21. The second hook from the damaged Red Wing double leg synthetic sling was laying on top of the tail drive, under the #173 shield canopy.
22. The operator utilizes the Red Wing double leg synthetic sling for the application of pulling/holding the shield canopies together by attaching one hook into each shield's teardrop pocket in a straight-line pull.
23. Mr. Walls hard hat was found under the SCSR cache box by his side. The hat was severely damaged on the back, around the left side, across the front and partially around the right side.
24. The IWT tracking system indicates Mr. Walls was 14 shields inby the actively mining shear, operating the Joy Shields located on the tailgate.
25. The obtained camera video shows Mr. Walls' light falling off at 7:50:41 a.m.
26. The obtained camera video shows Mr. Walls' light moving on the mine floor at 7:51:15 a.m.
27. Mr. Derek Born possesses a WVOMHS&T Underground Coal Miner's Certification Number 1-20951.
28. Mr. Born possesses a WVOMHS&T Underground Mine Foreman Certification Number 42593-20.

29. The IWT tracking system indicates Mr. Born, the midnight fire boss, arrived on the section at 12:06 a.m. His first longwall face examination was completed at 3:02 a.m. and he returned to the headgate at 3:36 a.m.
30. Mr. Born reported that he started an examination at 1:10 a.m. and completed it at 1:30 a.m., but IWT tracking does not show him traveling the face at that time. The tracking shows him traveling from 2:58 a.m. to 3:36 a.m.
31. Mr. Born reported that he started an examination at 5:10 a.m. and completed it at 5:30 a.m., but IWT tracking does not show him traveling the face again after traveling it from 2:58 a.m. to 3:36 a.m.
32. Mr. Born reported that he started an examination at 7:05 a.m. and completed it at 7:15 a.m., but IWT tracking does not show him traveling the face again after traveling it from 2:58 a.m. to 3:36 a.m.
33. According to the Leer Mine IWT tracking system, Mr. Born's location was shown at different locations throughout his reported examination times. At 1:19 a.m. Mr. Born was shown at three (3) block outby in the track entry. At 5:21 a.m. Mr. Born was shown at six (6) block outby on the section belt line. At 7:10 a.m. Mr. Born was shown at seven to eight (7-8) block outby in the section belt entry. Mr. Born was at the head drive of the longwall at 7:55 a.m. and traveled to the tail at 8:02 a.m.

Conclusion

Colton Walls was operating the #172 and #173 tailgate shields, located on the longwall face. While advancing the #173 shield, a Red Wing double leg synthetic sling that was attached between #173 and #172 shields exceeded its length and weight capacity, resulting in the coupling ring and hook dislodging from the #172 shield and striking Mr. Walls, resulting in a fatal injury.

Enforcement Action

During the investigation a non-assessed order was issued in accordance with Title 36, Series 19, Section 7.1 of the West Virginia Code of State Rules. Five Notices of Violations were issued during this investigation. Two were contributing and three were non-contributing.

Acknowledgement

The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the management and employees of ACI Tygart Valley, Leer Mine and the Mine Safety and Health Administration during this investigation.

Victim Information

Name of Victim Colton Walls Age of Victim 34 years

Total Mining Experience 14 years 7 months Experience at this Mine 7 years 4 months.

Average Number of Days Worked Per Week 3 days

Average Number of Hours Worked Per Week 36 hours per week

Length of Shifts at Mine 12 hours Travel Time To/From Work 52 minutes

Occupation at Time of Accident Longwall Electrician

Regular Occupation Longwall Electrician

Miners Certification 1-18108 Other Certifications

Date of Accident 28th day of September 2024 at 7:50 O'clock a.m.

Location of Accident Leer Mine 10-Left, Longwall Face, Tail Drive #172 shield

Cause of Accident Struck by Red Wing Double Leg Synthetic Sling

Date of Death 4th Day of October 2024

Mine InformationCompany ACI Tygart ValleyMine Name Leer MineWV Permit No. U00200406AMSHA Permit No. 46-09192Address 1200 Tygart Drive Grafton WV 26354County Taylor Phone No. 304-265-9700Date Permit Issued 09-06-2012Working Status ActiveUnion _____ Non-Union XDaily Production 30,000 raw tons Annual Production to Date: 5,223,919 raw tonsTotal Employees 572 Number of Shifts 3Coal Seam Name and Thickness Lower Kittanning 5 footAccident Incident Rate .59 Lost Time Accidents 2 Fatalities 1Type of Haulage Track, Rubber Tired Equipment and Belt Conveyor SystemWVOMHST Inspectors Nathan Sharp / Chris RayDate of Last Inspection 9/26/2024Notified by WVEMD Time of Notification 8:08 a.m.CMSP – Contact Person Joshua Leichliter