WEST VIRGINA OFFICE OF MINERS' HEALTH, SAFETY AND

Report of Fatality
Coal Processing Facility
Hoisting Accident

August 26, 2025

Marfork Coal Company, LLC
Marfork Processing
L00000646

Region IV Office
337 Industrial Drive
Oak Hill, West Virginia 25901
Christopher Dawson, Inspector-at-Large

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Photo 1

Accident Location

Photo 2

Operator controls located on top of the elevator car

Photo 3

Red wire installed in terminal 24 and contacting blue wire installed in terminal 17 creating a jumper

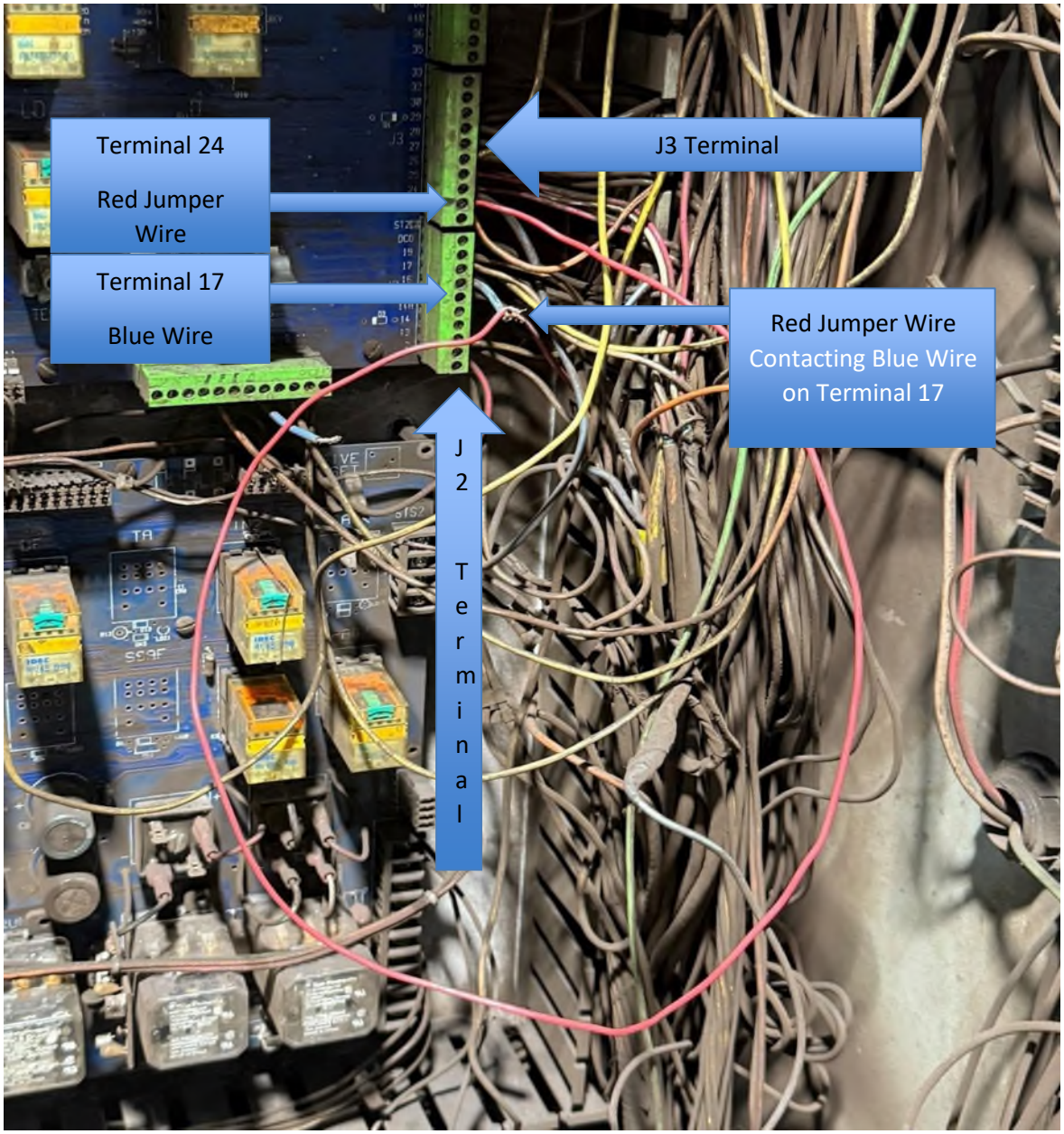
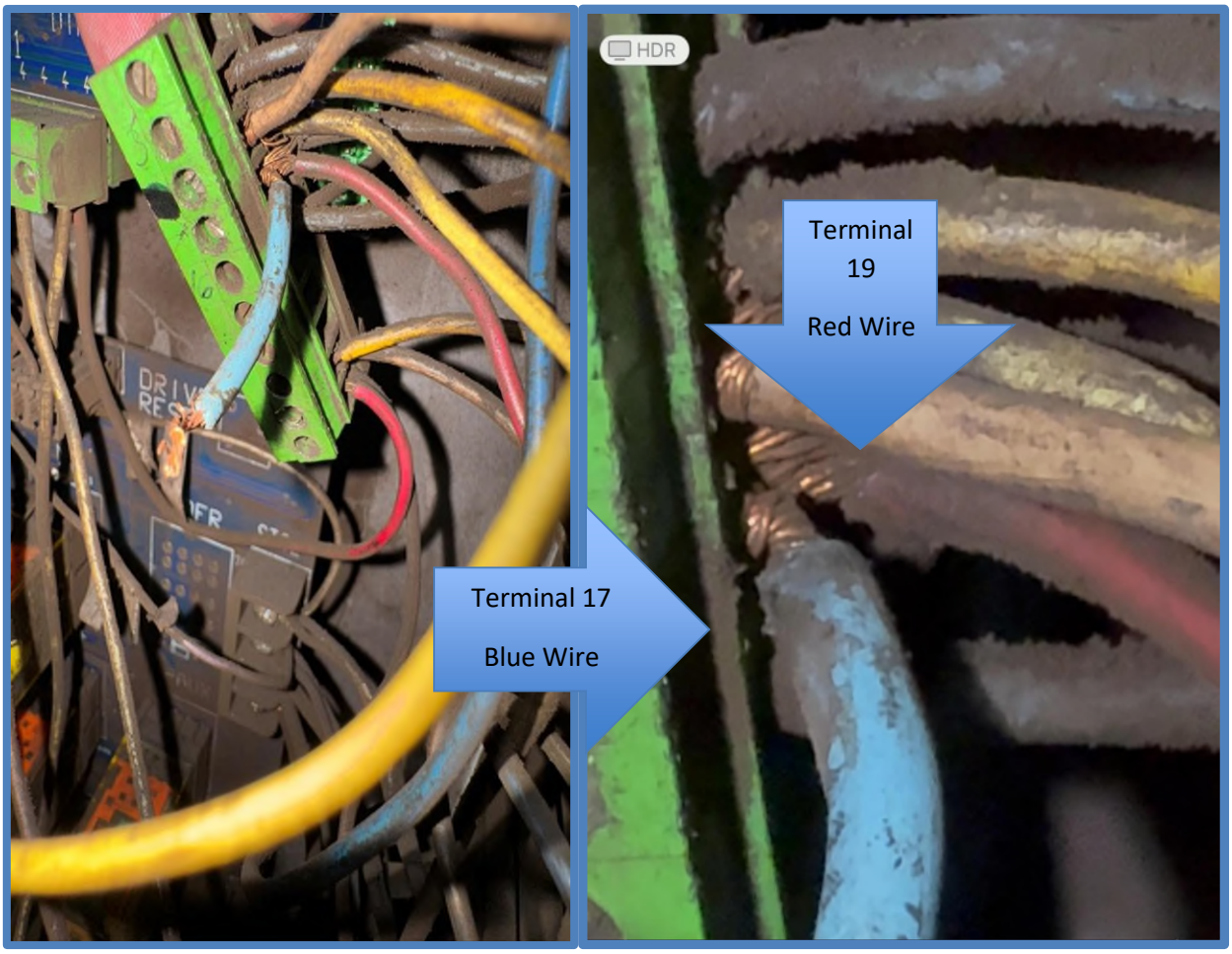


Photo 4

Frayed wires in terminals 17 and 19 allowed unintended contact.



***The red wire that created the jumper was removed prior to this photo.**

Timeline

August 26, 2025

- At approximately 5:40 a.m. Cody Estep, Plant Electrician/Mechanic, called the elevator to the first floor, and it did not arrive. Mr. Estep proceeded up the steps to the control room and was informed by coworkers that the elevator was not working. Mr. Estep then went to start checking the elevator to see if he could reset the controller, then checked the fuses.

- At approximately 6:00 a.m. Mr. Bartram, Electrician, started his shift. He was assigned to work on the third-floor dryer by Joe Hosler, Chief Electrician.

- Between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. Mr. Bartram relieved Mr. Estep and started troubleshooting the elevator. Mr. Estep then started cleaning up the elevator headhouse (also called a hoisthouse) area.

- At approximately 9:00 a.m. Josh McNeely, Mine Health and Safety Specialist, arrived at the plant office to conduct an inspection. Mr. McNeely had intended to check the elevator, but was notified by Mr. Hosler that the elevator was down. Mr. McNeely checked the examination records and went to conduct an inspection in the Synfuel Building, accompanied by Mr. Hosler.

- Shortly before 10:00 a.m. Mr. Hosler was notified that the elevator was repaired by Mr. Bartram. Mr. Holser instructed Mr. Bartram to come to plant office and accompany Mr. McNeely to inspect the elevator.

- At 10:09 a.m. Brandon Coleman, pipefitter, Mr. McNeely and Mr. Bartram exited the elevator on the sixth floor.

- At 10:10 a.m. Mr. McNeely and Mr. Bartram walked up the steps to the elevator headhouse.

- Between 10:10 a.m. and 10:24 a.m. Mr. McNeely and Mr. Bartram descended to the first floor. Mr. McNeely then left Mr. Bartram to get the "go/no-go gauge" from his vehicle.

- At 10:24 a.m. Mr. McNeely was seen on camera by his vehicle.

- At 10:31 a.m. Mr. Estep walked near the elevator first-floor landing and observed Mr. Bartram caught between the bottom of the elevator car and the first-floor landing. Mr. McNeely arrived at approximately the same time. Mr. Estep immediately called for help and said to shut the plant down.

- At 10:33 a.m. Frankie Davis, Plant Superintendent, arrived and retrieved the first aid equipment then began administering first aid.
- At 10:34 a.m. Sanford Carriger, Maintenance Chief Outside Plant, arrived and traveled to the second-floor elevator landing where he accessed the manual inspection controls located on top of the elevator car.
- At 10:35 a.m. Chris Simms, Maintenance Superintendent, and Mr. Hosler arrived and traveled to the headhouse, intending to manually raise the elevator car from inside the control cabinet. As they entered the headhouse, they were notified by radio communication from Mr. Carriger that the elevator car had been raised and Mr. Bartram had been pulled from underneath the elevator car.
- At 10:38 a.m. Mr. Carriger arrived back at the first-floor landing and assisted with first aid treatment.
- At approximately 11:04 a.m. Whitesville Ambulance crew arrived and took over the treatment of Mr. Bartram.
- At 11:20 a.m. Mr. Bartram was pronounced deceased by order of Dr. Kristen Babiak, CAMC, when contacted by ambulance personnel.

General Information

Marfork Coal Company, LLC owns and operates Marfork Processing, a surface bituminous coal processing facility located in Raleigh County, West Virginia. Marfork Processing employs 87 miners and operates two, twelve-hour production shifts per day, seven days per week.

On August 26, 2025, Eric Bartram, Electrician, was fatally injured at the preparation plant after being caught between the bottom of the elevator car and the first-floor basement elevator landing. See Photo 1 on page 1.

The elevator system involved in the accident consisted of the following four components: the elevator, the braking system, the governor, and the circuit control board (inside the control cabinet). The elevator and braking system identify the manufacturer as Montgomery Kone (serial number 87913). The governor manufacturer is identified as Hollister-Whitney. The circuit control board nameplate identifies the manufacturer as Elevator Controls Corp. (serial number 5093).

At the time of the accident, Industrial Commercial Elevators (I.C.E.) was the company responsible for conducting the required examinations of the elevator, except for the required daily hoisting examinations. Technicians employed by Industrial Commercial Elevator assisted investigators during the investigation and assisted with the function testing of the entire elevator system.

Accident Description

On August 26, 2025, at approximately 6:00 a.m., Mr. Bartram arrived at the plant office to begin his shift. Shortly after 6:00 a.m., Mr. Bartram was assigned by Mr. Hosler to perform work on the third-floor dryer.

Mr. Estep started his shift at approximately 5:40 a.m., entered the plant, went to the basement floor and called for the elevator, but it failed to arrive. Mr. Estep traveled up the steps to the control room, located between the third and fourth floors, where he was talking with coworkers and was told that the elevator was down.

Mr. Estep proceeded to the sixth floor, traveled up the additional set of steps and entered the headhouse to reset the system, but was unable to get the elevator to "Operate" due to a fault code indicating that there was a door unlocked. Mr. Estep began walking down to each floor landing and found the hatch doors on the third floor had not closed. Mr. Estep manually shut the doors and returned to the headhouse to reset the system and operate the elevator, but it was unsuccessful.

Mr. Estep retrieved a meter from the third floor and returned to the headhouse to begin troubleshooting by checking fuses. Mr. Estep stated that checking fuses and pushing a reset was all that he had strong knowledge of concerning the elevator control panel. Shortly after, Mr. Estep determined that all the fuses were good, and he turned the job over to Mr. Bartram when he arrived at the headhouse.

Mr. Bartram began troubleshooting the issue with the elevator and Mr. Estep began cleaning up in the headhouse. Mr. Bartram had left, then returned and told Mr. Estep that the third-floor doors were not completely closed. Mr. Bartram then tried to reset the system but was unsuccessful. Mr. Estep was called by radio to report to the basement floor to spray magnetite. Mr. Bartram was still troubleshooting the elevator when Mr. Estep departed the headhouse.

At approximately 9:00 a.m., Mr. McNeely arrived to conduct normal inspection duties. Mr. McNeely had intended to conduct an inspection of the plant elevator but was informed by Mr. Hosler that the elevator was down and currently being repaired. Mr. McNeely told Mr. Hosler that there were other things he could inspect. Mr. McNeely started by checking examination records. Once Mr. McNeely finished checking examination records, he traveled with Mr. Hosler to the Synfuel Building Motor Control Center (MCC) room and began inspecting that area.

Mr. Hosler was notified that the elevator was back in operation shortly before 10:00 a.m. Mr. Hosler instructed Mr. Bartram to return to the plant office to meet Mr. McNeely and assist with his inspection of the elevator. Mr. Bartram met Mr. McNeely at the plant office, walked over to the plant and proceeded to the sixth floor to begin examining the elevator.

They arrived at the headhouse and examined everything visible in the headhouse. Mr. Bartram asked Mr. McNeely if he needed to open the locked circuit control cabinet to allow him to look inside and he said "Yes". After removing the lock, Mr. Bartram opened the two doors on the circuit control cabinet, as they both looked inside. After closing and locking the doors, Mr. Bartram and Mr. McNeely traveled to the sixth floor to get on top of the elevator car to begin the required checks that Mr. McNeely wanted to do.

At approximately 10:15 a.m., the elevator car was sent to the fifth floor to allow Mr. Bartram and Mr. McNeely to access the top of the elevator car from the sixth floor. Once the elevator car stopped, the doors on the sixth floor were opened by Mr. Bartram and the controls were switched from "Operate" mode to "Inspect" mode on the control box located on top of the elevator car. (See Photo 2, Page 2).

Once on top of the elevator car, it was determined that the "go/no-go gauge" used for measuring rope diameter was not on top of the car where it is normally kept. Mr. McNeely told Mr. Bartram that he would get his "go/no-go gauge" from his vehicle. They decided to go down to the first floor and look at the pit area first, as it needed to be inspected as well. Both men retreated from the top of the car, switched the mode into "Operate", and rode the elevator car to the first floor and then exited.

It is unknown if Mr. Bartram pushed the button when exiting the elevator car and sent it to the sixth floor or if it returned home (sixth floor) as it is programmed to do when idle and not in use.

After exiting the elevator car on the first floor, Mr. Bartram opened the hatch doors. Mr. McNeely observed the counterweight at the pit, which would indicate that the elevator is on the sixth floor. Mr. Bartram and Mr. McNeely began looking for the "go/no-go gauge" in the pit area from the landing on the first floor. They did not observe the gauge in the pit area visible to them from their location.

Mr. Bartram pushed the emergency stop button, which is located toward the left side of the landing doors in the pit area. Mr. McNeely asked if the button felt like it worked, which would prevent the elevator from moving. Mr. Bartram replied "Yes, I can try to call it if you want." Mr. McNeely responded, "You can if you want, I am going to my vehicle to get my "go/no-go gauge"." Mr. McNeely left the plant and returned to the parking area in front of the plant office where his vehicle was parked.

At approximately 10:30 a.m., Mr. Estep was walking out of the plant and observed Mr. Bartram caught between the bottom of the elevator car and the first-floor landing. Mr. McNeely had returned at roughly the same time as Mr. Estep pointed at Mr. Bartram. Mr. Estep then used his hand-held radio to call for help, to have someone call 911 and to idle the plant.

Casey Acord, Plant Foreman, Mr. Davis and Mr. Carriger were in route back to the plant from the maintenance building. Christopher Simms, Maintenance Superintendent, was in another area of

the plant along with other workers when the call came through the radio. Most of the people responding to the call for help arrived at the site around the same time.

Mr. Davis went to gather first aid equipment. At the same time, Mr. Hosler and Mr. Simms went to the sixth floor preparing to bypass the elevator safety circuit. This would allow the elevator car to be moved while Mr. Carriger and Mr. Acord traveled to the second-floor elevator landing. It was the closest place to gain access to the top of the elevator, where the controls are located, to manually move the elevator.

Connor Smith, Maxxim Shared Services Foreman, and Roger Toney, Mechanic, arrived to assist in pulling Mr. Bartram out from the areas he was caught between. When Mr. Carriger and Mr. Acord arrived on the second floor, Mr. Carriger asked Mr. Acord for his screwdriver and used it to open the hatch doors at the second-floor landing.

After opening the doors, Mr. Carriger flipped the switch on the control box from "Operate" to "Inspect". Mr. Carriger instructed Mr. Smith and Mr. Toney to hold on to Mr. Bartram and to be prepared to pull him out once the elevator was raised.

Mr. Carriger then accessed the top of the elevator, pushed the "Safe" and "Up" buttons simultaneously, and the elevator began to rise. Mr. Carriger could see through the gap and when he saw Mr. Bartram had been pulled out from underneath the elevator car, he stopped the car and relayed this on the radio. Mr. Simms and Mr. Hosler asked for confirmation that Bartram had been freed, as they had not made it to the circuit control cabinet to bypass any features needed to move the elevator. Mr. Carriger confirmed that Mr. Bartram was no longer caught between the elevator car and the first-floor landing, then travelled back to the first floor. Meanwhile, Mr. Simms and Mr. Hosler locked out the disconnect in the headhouse and the breaker in the Midds MCC room.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Toney began assessing Mr. Bartram and could not detect a pulse. Mark Cooper, Maintenance Planner, Mr. Simms, Mr. Carriger and Mr. Acord began performing CPR and utilized the AED until EMS Services arrived.

Findings of Fact

1. Investigators examined the electrical system and determined that a red jumper wire was connected in the circuit control board (J3) under terminal 24 and was connected to a blue pigtail wire that was connected to the circuit control board (J2) under terminal 17. (See Photo 3, Page 3). This condition of wiring created a bypass of the following safety features: emergency stop buttons, limit switches, buffer switches, and governor switches. Installing jumpers is only allowed by trained and qualified individuals and only for testing or troubleshooting purposes.

2. There was also an unintended connection that existed in that there were wires installed on the circuit control board (J2) were intermittently touching. The wires were in terminals 17 and 19 on the (J2) terminal block. (See Photo 4, Page 4) This was observed by investigators and confirmed with an electrical measurement between the two terminals that indicated continuity between 4 ohms and 15k ohms. This created a bypass of all the door interlock switches at each landing. Investigators determined that connection between wires in these terminals would have bridged out the door circuit and would allow the elevator car to move with the doors open. The mine operator did not properly maintain the electrical components of the elevator system in safe operating condition.
3. The elevator was not locked and tagged out of service prior to the victim being positioned in the hoist well where he was caught between by the descending elevator car and the first-floor landing.

Conclusion

Mr. Bartram was fatally injured when he was caught between the elevator car and the first-floor landing. The jumper wire and the wires inside the control cabinet that were intermittently making contact, along with not locking and tagging the elevator out-of-service to block against motion allowed the accident to occur.

Enforcement Action

The following enforcement actions were taken as a result of the investigation.

A non-assessed control order was issued in accordance with Title 56, Series 3, Section 51 of the West Virginia Mining Rules and Regulations to preserve evidence following the accident.

A total of 3 violations were issued during the investigation. Two of the violations were contributory to the fatality.

Recommendations

1. Train all employees in the importance of de-energizing, locking, and tagging equipment out of service before entering pinch point areas.
2. Train all employees to remove all jumpers that are used during troubleshooting before returning equipment back into service.
3. Train all employees on the importance of properly terminating conductors to prevent inadvertent contact with other conductors.

Acknowledgement

The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training would like to acknowledge the cooperation of employees and management of Marfork Coal Company LLC Marfork Processing, Industrial Commercial Elevator and the Mine Safety and Health Administration during this investigation.

Marfork Coal Company, LLC Employees

Jason Whitehead – President and COO – Alpha Metallurgical Resources
Brian Keaton – Senior Vice President Safety and Health – Alpha Metallurgical Resources
Barrett Justice – President of Operations – Marfork Coal Company
Scott Toler – VP of Operations – Marfork Coal Company
Mike Vaught – Director of Safety – Marfork Coal Company
Kris Burke – Director of Maintenance – Marfork Coal Company
Frankie Davis – Superintendent – Marfork Processing
Christopher Simms – Maintenance Superintendent – Marfork Processing
Joe Hosler – Chief Electrician – Marfork Processing
Sanford Carriger – Maintenance Chief Outside Plant – Marfork Processing
Dave Schoolcraft – Safety Supervisor – Marfork Processing

Industrial Commercial Elevator

J.R. Gielarowski – Elevator Technician
Mike Hartman – Elevator Technician

Mine Safety and Health Administration

Craig Plumley – District Manager IV
Larry Bailey – Assistant District Manager
Joseph Presley – Supervisory Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Gregory Ward – Supervisory Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Jerome Stone – Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Chris Dodson – Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Jeremy Snuffer – Mine Safety and Health Specialist
William Bane – Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Rick Cregger – Mine Safety and Health Specialist
David Birchfield – Supervisory Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Robert Bates – Chief Electrical Engineer, Technical Support, Mine Safety and Health Specialist
Martin Holbrook – Mine Safety and Health Specialist

West Virginia Office of Miner's Health, Safety and Training

Jeffory Davis – Chief Electrical Inspector – Lead Investigator
Charles Haga – Electrical Inspector
Christopher Dawson – Inspector-at-Large
Charles Moles – Assistant Inspector-at-Large

Appendix

- Mine Information Sheet
- Victim Information Sheet

Mine Information

Company Marfork Coal Company, LLC

Mine Name Marfork Processing

WV Permit L00000646

Address 370 Packsville Marfork Rd, Packsville WV 25209

County Raleigh

Date Permit Issued August 8, 1994 **Working Status** Active

Location Packsville, WV

Union No **Non-Union** Yes

Daily Processing 42,000 Raw Tons

Annual Processing to Date 6,124,600 Raw Tons

Total Employees 87 **Number of Shifts** 2

Lost Time Accidents 1

WV OMHST Inspector Chris Blankenship

Date of Last Inspection August 25, 2025

Notified By Frankie Davis

Time of Notification 10:40 a.m.

CMSP Contact Person Michael Vaught

Victim Information

Name of Victim Eric Bartram

Age of Victim 41 Years, 364 Days

Total Mining Experience 14 Years

Experience at This Mine 11 Years

Average Number of Days Worked Per Week 5 Days

Average Number of Hours Worked Per Week 50 Hours

Length of Shifts at Mine 10 Hours

Travel Time To/From Work 1 Hour (Each Direction)

Occupation at Time of Accident Electrician

Regular Occupation Electrician

Miner's Certification Surface Miner

Other Certifications Certified Electrician, EMT-M

Date of Accident August 26, 2025, at approximately 10:30 a.m.

Location of Accident Elevator landing on first-floor/basement