

Report of Fatality

Fall of Mine Roof
Underground Mine

April 2, 2026

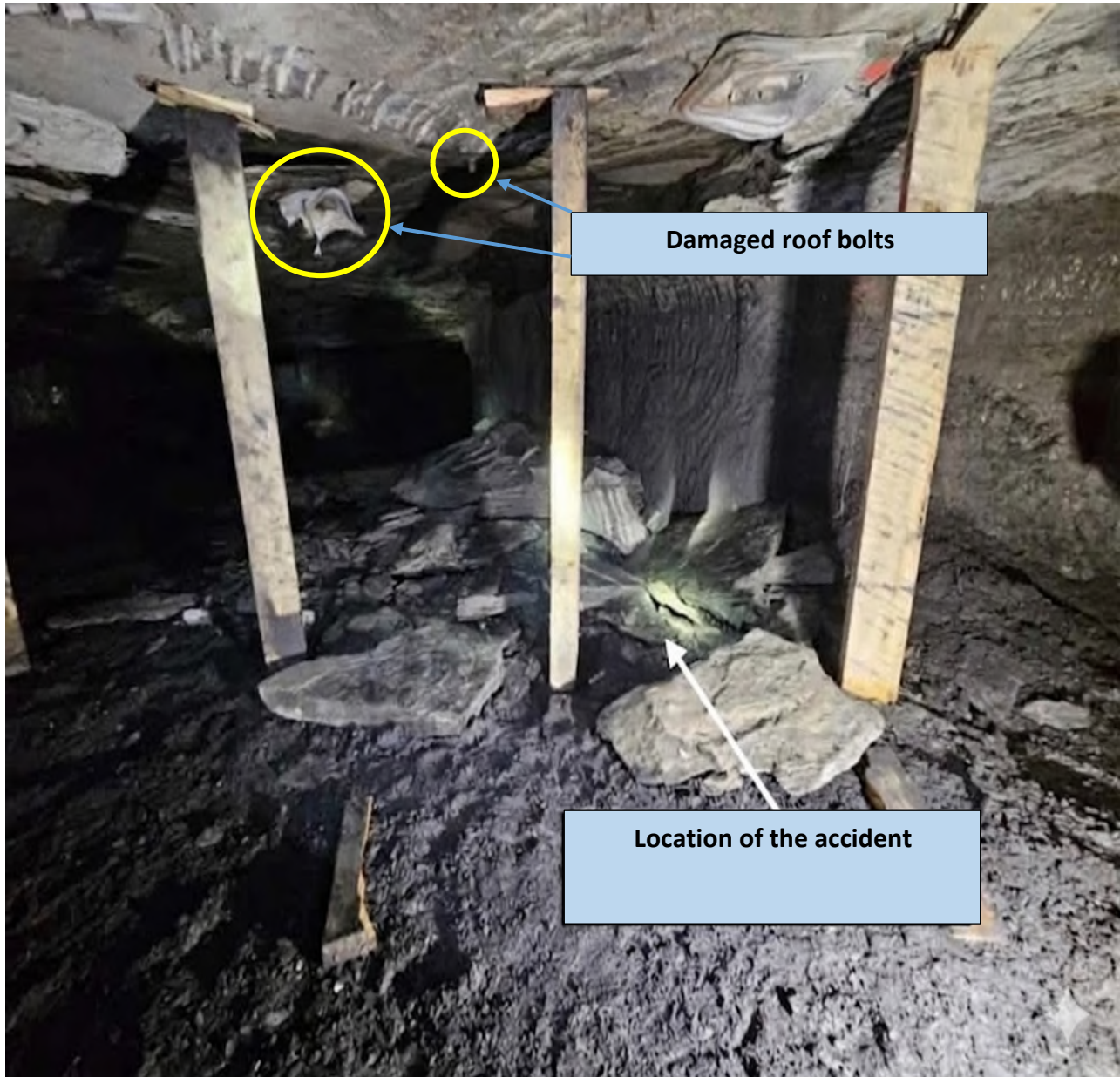
Marfork Coal Company, LLC
Panther Eagle Mine
Permit Number U00300398
Near Naomi, WV in Raleigh County

Region IV Office
337 Industrial Drive
Oak Hill, WV 24901
Christopher Dawson, Inspector-at-Large

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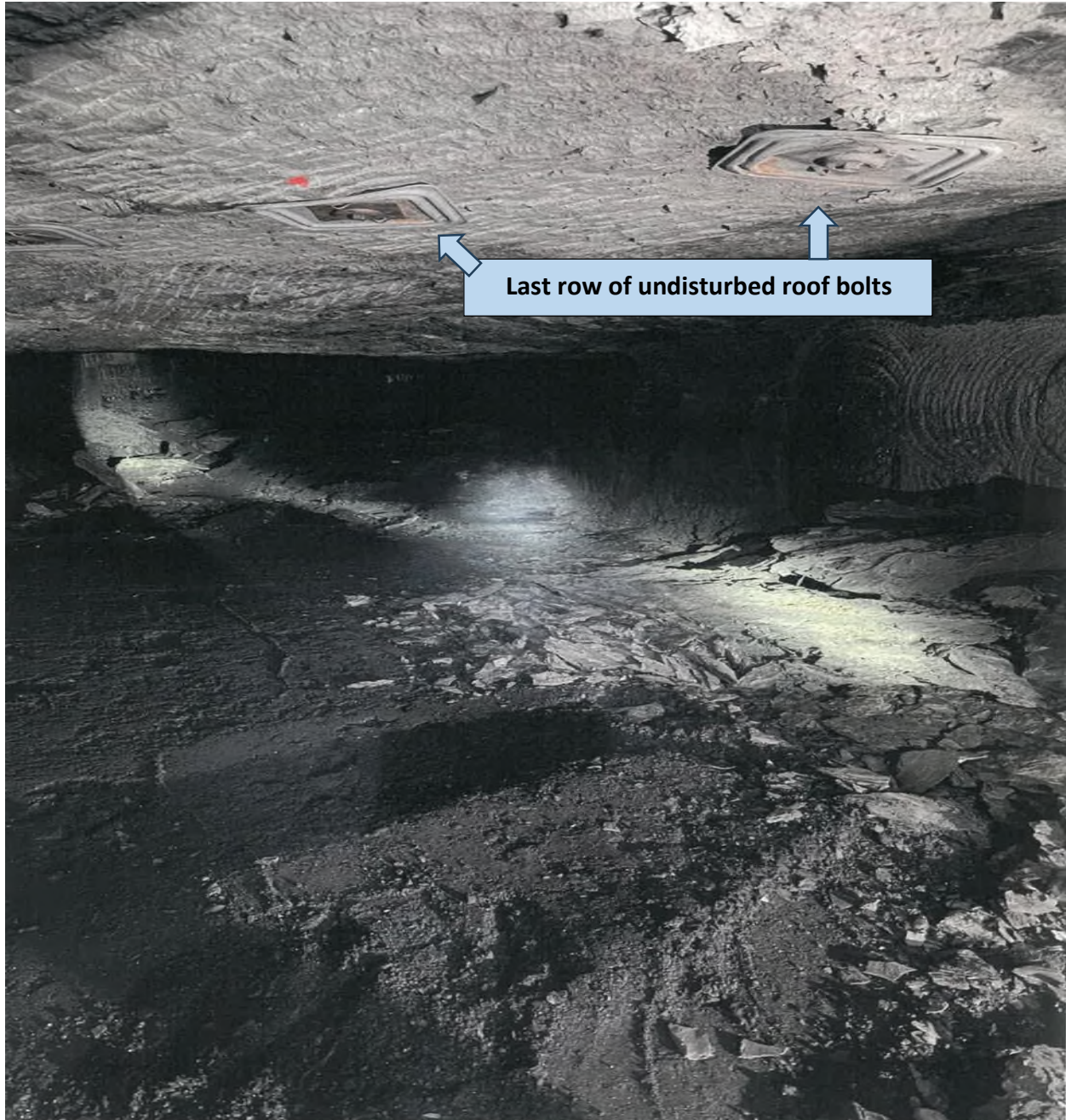
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Photos



#12 Entry, #2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift

*The rocks in this photo have been moved from where they fell to free Mr. Warrix from underneath them.



#2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift

(This is the area that had been mined prior to this accident.)

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General Information

This report is based on an investigation conducted in accordance with West Virginia Code, Chapter 22A, Article 1, Section 14.

The Panther Eagle Mine was permitted on August 4, 2017. The Panther Eagle Mine employs 175 people. The mine utilizes five mechanized mining units (MMU), two super sections, and a Continuous Haulage Bridge Unit to mine coal from the Eagle Seam. The mine operates on a traditional schedule, consisting of five and six working days per week. This mine works three shifts per day, two production shifts and one maintenance shift. All shifts are 10-hour shifts. This mine utilizes two portals for transporting miners and supplies.

Aaron Warrix worked as a Shuttle Car Operator for Marfork Coal Company, LLC, at the Panther Eagle Mine from May 5, 2020, to April 2, 2026. Mr. Warrix was a certified Underground Miner, with 24 years of total mining experience. Mr. Warrix's last Annual Refresher was on February 17, 2026. Mr. Warrix died on April 2, 2026, from serious injuries sustained on April 2, 2026, when he was struck by a piece of mine roof while working at the Panther Eagle Mine.

On April 2, 2026, the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training (WVOMHS&T) received notice of the accident and began their investigation.

Formal interviews were conducted on April 8, 2026, at the Region IV Office, in Oak Hill, WV. The following individuals voluntarily testified:

Elijah Hensley – Electrician
Cody Catlett – Continuous Miner Operator
Jacob Stables – Shuttle Car Operator
Tracy Lester – Shuttle Car Operator
Chris Green – Roof Bolter Operator
Chauncy Freeman – General Mine Foreman
Chris Snuffer – Electrician
Ben Hapney – Day Shift Section Foreman
Ronald Blevins – Continuous Miner Operator
Colton Adkins – Roof Bolter Operator
Ethan Jarrell – Scoop Operator
Matt Boulet – Evening Shift Section Foreman

Accident Description

On April 2, 2026, at 2:15 p.m., the #3 Pillar Section Crew attended a safety meeting in the safety meeting room on the surface of the Horse Creek portal of the Panther Eagle Mine, then proceeded to the mantrip and traveled to the section. At approximately 3:10 p.m., the #3 Pillar Section Crew arrived at the end of the section track. They then proceeded to a MAC-12 rubber-tired vehicle which transported them to the section, arriving outby the section power center at approximately 3:20 p.m.

Matt Boulet, Section Foreman, conducted an Imminent Danger check of the Pillar Section travelways and gob lines while the equipment operators checked their equipment. After this was completed, Jacob Stables, Shuttle Car Operator, and Ronnie Blevins, Continuous Miner Operator, produced coal from the #2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift in the #12 Entry, finishing at approximately 4:55 p.m. The continuous mining machine was then backed outby into the intersection to set cutter bits and clean water sprays.

While Mr. Blevins was setting cutter bits and cleaning water sprays, Aaron Warrix and Mr. Stables installed turn timbers for the upcoming left lift. At approximately 5:05 p.m., Mr. Warrix and Mr. Stables were walking away after installing turn timbers, when a rock measuring 5' x 3' x 4" fell from the mine roof, knocking Mr. Warrix to the ground and landing on his lower back. Some smaller rocks struck his legs and pelvic area. During formal interviews, Mr. Stables stated that the mine roof fell without warning. Colton Adkins, Roof Bolter Operator, stated that he observed Mr. Warrix on his elbows attempting to get up immediately after the fall.

Mr. Stables and Kyle Harron, Shuttle Car Operator, removed the rocks from Mr. Warrix, moved him to a safe location and began rendering first aid. Chris Green, Roof Bolter Operator, stabilized Mr. Warrix's neck while others gathered medical supplies. Mr. Warrix remained conscious and was talking to other coworkers about his pain and other subjects. Responders applied a cervical collar and medical grade oxygen and used a backboard to stabilize him. Mr. Warrix was transported via a MAC-12 rubber-tired vehicle to a rail mounted ride at the end of the track, then transported to the surface to meet Jan Care Ambulance.

Upon arriving on the surface, Mr. Warrix was transferred from the rail mounted vehicle to the ambulance, and his care was transferred to the Jan Care Ambulance personnel. Mr. Stables accompanied Mr. Warrix in the ambulance to the Marfork main office, where the helicopter landing zone was located. While enroute to the landing zone, Mr. Warrix went into cardiac arrest. Mr. Stables performed chest compressions until they reached the landing zone. A helicopter flight crew took over Mr. Warrix's care at the landing zone to transport Mr. Warrix to Charleston Area Medical Center General Hospital. Mr. Warrix later succumbed to his injuries at approximately 8:19 p.m.

Timeline

April 2, 2026

- At approximately 5:45 a.m., a pre-shift examination was reported by Trent Bays, Midnight Section Foreman, to Ben Hapney, Day Shift Section Foreman, that stated the section was “under construction” and that “air movement was moving in the proper direction” with seven air readings from Evaluation Points (EP) on the section.
- At approximately 1:50 p.m., a pre-shift examination was reported by Mr. Hapney to Rusty Older, Mine Examiner. The hazardous condition noted in the report was that the #12 Entry was “part pulled” and the action taken as “Tagged/Reported”.
- At approximately 2:15 p.m., the #3 Pillar Section Crew held a safety meeting at the Horse Creek portal area of Panther Eagle Mine.
- At approximately 3:20 p.m., the #3 Pillar Section Crew arrived at the section power center.
- At approximately 4:00 p.m., Jacob Stables, Shuttle Car Operator and Ronnie Blevins, Continuous Miner Operator, started producing coal from #2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift in the #12 Entry.
- At approximately 4:55 p.m., the Continuous Miner Operator finished the #2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift.
- At approximately 5:05 p.m., as the Continuous Miner Operator was setting cutter bits and cleaning water sprays, Mr. Warrix and Mr. Stables installed timbers for the upcoming left lift, when Mr. Warrix was struck by a piece of mine roof and knocked to the mine floor.
- At approximately 6:15 p.m., Mr. Warrix’s care was transferred over to the Jan Care Ambulance personnel.
- At approximately 6:31 p.m., the ambulance transported Mr. Warrix to the Marfork main office where the landing zone was located. While enroute, Mr. Warrix went into cardiac arrest. Mr. Stables performed chest compressions until they reached the Marfork main office. A flight crew took over Mr. Warrix’s care at the landing zone for transport to Charleston Area Medical Center General Hospital.
- At approximately 8:19 p.m., Mr. Warrix succumbed to his injuries.
- At approximately 10:00 p.m., the investigative teams of Marfork Coal Company, Mine Safety and Health Association (MSHA), and WVOMHS&T, traveled to the accident scene from the surface.
- At approximately 11:26 p.m., the investigative teams arrived at the scene and began their investigation.

Findings of Fact

1. The mine was using timbers for Retreat Mining.
2. The mining height was 61 inches.
3. The Approved Roof Control Plan states that "when a pillar block is being mined by using twin lifts, the lifts shall be 12' wide and the depth shall be limited to half the pillar width, or 32 ft. measured from the last row, which ever is less."
4. The entire width of the coal block being mined was 34.2 feet wide.
5. The #2 Right-Hand Pillar Lift was measured at a depth of 49 feet, 11 inches with a Hilti Laser Measurer and was more than 22 feet wide on a 12 feet approved plan.
6. The #1 Left Lift was measured to be 35.7 feet from the last permanent row of roof bolts, with a Hilti Laser Measurer.
7. Mr. Warrix was issued an Apprentice Miner certification on October 22, 2001.
8. Mr. Warrix was issued an Underground Coal Miner certification on September 25, 2002.
9. Mr. Warrix received his Retreat Mining Plan Training on March 6, 2026.
10. Mr. Warrix was a Shuttle Car Operator/Timberman at the time of the accident.
11. Mr. Warrix received injuries from the roof which had fallen from the area where one roof bolt was sheared off and the other roof bolt had become dislodged.
12. Mr. Warrix remained conscious and talked to coworkers about his pain and other subjects. Responders applied cervical collar and medical grade oxygen and used a backboard to stabilize him.
13. Mr. Warrix was transported via a MAC-12 rubber-tired vehicle to a rail ride at the end of the track, then he was transported to the surface.
14. When Mr. Warrix arrived on the surface and was transferred to the Jan Care Ambulance, Mr. Stables accompanied Mr. Warrix to the Marfork helicopter landing zone, where the helicopter crew took responsibility for Mr. Warrix.

Conclusion

Mr. Warrix received fatal injuries from falling rock in the area of the #12 Entry, #2 Lift, where one roof bolt was sheared off and another roof bolt had become dislodged. Mr. Warrix was transported to the surface to an awaiting ambulance. While the ambulance was enroute to the Marfork landing zone, Mr. Warrix went into cardiac arrest. Mr. Warrix later succumbed to his injuries at approximately 8:19 p.m. on April 2, 2026, at Charleston Area Medical Center General Hospital.

Enforcement Action

A Non-Assessed Control Order was issued in accordance with Title 36, Series 19, Section 7.1 of the West Virginia Code of State Rules.

An addendum to the Comprehensive Mine Safety Program in Section IV: Procedures for Promoting Safe Working Practices, now states "Pillar lifts will be taken at or as close as possible to the angle depicted in retreat mining drawings in the approved roof control plan".

A sentence was added to the approved Roof Control Plan that states "No persons shall be permitted to install Breaker Posts with their back turned towards unsupported roof". All miners will be trained on the Roof Control revisions to pages 22A, 31A and 32, prior to resuming production, and will start using the new Roof Control Plan immediately.

Four Notices of Violations were issued during this investigation, with one being contributory.

Recommendations

Retrain all underground personnel on the Approved Roof Control Plan, more specifically, maximum cut depths and widths while Retreat Mining. Also, retrain all personnel on what mine roof conditions are considered to be supported and unsupported and how one should position themselves when setting standing roof support.

Acknowledgement

The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training acknowledge the cooperation of employees and management of Marfork Coal Company, LLC-Panther Eagle Mine and the Mine Safety and Health Administration during this investigation. We would like to thank the following people for their cooperation during this investigation:

Mike Vaught – Safety Director Mid WV Underground Region

Barrett Justice – President of Marfork Coal Company, LLC

Scott Toler – Vice President of Marfork Coal Company, LLC

Mark Rinchich – Superintendent Horse Creek Portal

Chauncey Freeman – General Mine Foreman Horse Creek Portal

Chris Curry – Safety Representative

Mine Safety and Health Administration employees

Michael Moten

Brian Redden

Daniel Morgan

Mark Muncy

Keith Stone

Tracy Calloway

Craig Plumley

Larry Bailey

Appendices

- Mine Information Sheet
- Victim Information Sheet

Mine Information

Company: Marfork Coal Company, LLC

Mine Name: Panther Eagle Mine

WV Permit: U00300398

Address: P.O. Box 457 – Whitesville, WV. 25209

County: Raleigh

Date Permit Issued: August 4, 2017 Working Status: Active

Location: 2.7 miles up Packsville/Marfork Road, off of Route 3

Union: _____ Non-Union: X

Daily Production: 2,645 Raw Tons

Annual Production to Date: 179,826 Raw Tons

Total Employees: 175 Number of Shifts: 3

Name of Coal Bed: Eagle Seam

Seam Thickness: 36 inches

Accident Incident Rate: 3.42 Lost Time Accidents: 5

Type of Haulage: Continuous miners with belt conveyor haulage

WV OMHS&T Inspector: Greg Davis

Date of Last Inspection: April 2, 2026

Notified by: Wesley Toney, Dispatcher

Time of Notification: 5:12 p.m.

CMSP – Anniversary Date: August 4, 2017

CMSP – Contact Person: Michael Vaught

Victim Information

Name of Victim: Aaron Wayne Warrix

Age of Victim: 53

Total Mining Experience: 23.5 Years

Experience at This Mine: 5 Years 7 Months

Average Number of Days Worked Per Week: 5.5

Average Number of Hours Worked Per Week: 50

Length of Shifts at Mine: 10 hours

Travel Time To/From Work: 2 Hours and 40 Minutes

Occupation at Time of Accident: Shuttle Car Operator

Regular Occupation: Shuttle Car Operator

Miner's Certification: 3-13986

Other Certifications: N/A

Date of Accident: 2nd Day of April 2026

At 5:05 p.m.

Location of Accident: #3 Section, #12 Entry outby Survey Station 21459