

/LOCAL NEWS

## Fire destroys coal waste processing facility at Consol's Bailey Mine complex

*Numerous fire departments respond to blaze fueled by burning diesel*

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BY MIKE JONES

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A facility used by a subcontractor to process coal waste at the Bailey Mine complex in northwestern Greene County was destroyed by fire Monday morning, prompting numerous departments to respond to fight the massive blaze fueled by diesel and other flammable materials.

Emergency responders were dispatched to Consol Energy's sprawling complex in Richhill Township shortly before 7 a.m. after the fire was reported inside the three-story building near the coal mine's prep plant, Greene County Emergency Management Director Rich Policz said.

"It's a pretty intense operation up here," Policz said.

Dark, black smoke could be seen billowing in the sky from miles away as firefighters tried to bring the blaze under control. Policz said no injuries were reported, and all workers at the complex were accounted for.

While the fire occurred on the Greene County side of the border, Policz said he was coordinating closely with his emergency management counterparts in Washington County since the underground mining complex straddles both counties. He said numerous fire departments from both counties and West Virginia were dispatched, and a parade of commercial water tankers could be seen entering the complex's front gates at Enon Church Road.

Fire trucks at the scene were driving back and forth inside the complex, appearing to go to a staging area to fill up with water before taking it directly to the site of the fire.

"It's not an issue getting water (to fight the fire)," Policz said. "Just coordinating to get them up there. We have a lot of tankers, plus the mine has tankers. It's just a very big coordinated effort."

The fire was under control by noon with firefighters dousing the charred remains with foam in the afternoon, Policz said. The facility had diesel fuel and numerous plastic pipes inside, along with chemicals stored outside of the building that crews worked to prevent from catching fire, he said.

Consol Energy spokesperson Erica Fisher said that while the fire was located on the Bailey Mine property, the building is owned by a "third party project partner" that is not operated by the coal company. She identified that subcontractor as Omnis Bailey LLC, and directed questions about the fire to that company, which could not be reached for comment. Fisher added that the fire did not impact Consol's mining operations at Bailey.

"This incident has no direct impact on Consol's mining operation, the preparation plant or our employees, so we're thankful for that," she said. "(Omnis Bailey) confirmed that all of their employees are accounted for

and no injuries were sustained.”

A company press release from Omnis Bailey in 2017 stated that it was working directly with Consol to construct a refinery at the Bailey complex to process waste coal from the mine for other uses. A Consol sustainability report stated that the “commercial scale” processing plant was completed in 2022 and converts waste coal into “marketable products, such as high-quality solid fuel or carbon feedstock.”

The Center for Coalfield Justice urged residents who live near the mine to monitor any health problems from particulates in the air due to the burning diesel fuel and other materials. The organization also demanded transparency from Consol and Omnis Bailey about what exactly was inside the building, and asked the companies to release a list of any harmful chemicals that may have burned in the fire.

“Our primary concern is the health and safety of the workers, residents, and first responders in Washington and Greene counties,” CCJ Executive Director Sarah Martik said in a written statement. “We urge immediate and transparent communication from Consol Energy and Omnis Bailey LLC about the nature and extent of the hazardous materials involved and the steps being taken to mitigate any environmental impact.”

Vehicles bearing logos from the state Department of Environmental Protection and the federal Mine Health and Safety Administration could be seen driving onto the property to assist in the investigation. Washington County’s Department of Safety command center also was at the site to help the various emergency management officials to coordinate their response.

DEP spokeswoman Lauren Camarda identified the building as the Omnis Regenerative Energy Facility, and said state regulators were working with their federal counterparts to see if there was any environmental damage from the fire.

“DEP has responded and is on site and coordinating with local fire departments and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,” Camarda said.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

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