

Underground Mine Blowout

Abandoned mine blowout



This blowout occurred on the morning of April 18, 2005 near the Knott-Floyd County line, just west of Garrett. Photos of the blowout were taken just hours after it was reported. It was the Consol James Fork Mine, operated during the late 1980's and early 1990's as an above drainage room and pillar mine in the Hazard No.4 seam. Water from the mine scoured trees and rock from the hillside, covering part of the Hal Rogers Parkway before entering Rock Fork. Water was still flowing at a rate of 300-400 gallons per minute one week after the blowout. The subsurface area of the mine is over 800 acres, with a seam thickness near 5 feet. If the mine were fully flooded, a conservative estimate of the potential water volume would exceed 600 million gallons. Blowouts occur when hydrostatic pressure within flooded, abandoned coal seams becomes too powerful for the coal barriers to withstand. This event happened in an unpopulated area, but other blowouts have caused injury and property damage, as hundreds of thousands of gallons of water have escaped with great velocity. As abandoned deep mines continue to age, erosion of mine barriers will further increase the probability that blowouts will occur. Photos courtesy of the Kentucky Division of Abandoned Mines.