

## **Emergency Reclamation at a Coal Refuse Fire in North Dakota**

On November 18, 1997, the North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) was informed of a dangerous coal refuse fire near the city of Noonan approximately 220 miles northwest of Bismarck. This fire had started on a portion of a coal screenings pile deposited by the historic Baukol-Noonan Mine. Deer hunters reported the fire to the Divide County Emergency Manager who then reported it to the PSC.

The Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Division of the PSC investigated the site on November 19 and found that about one acre of a thirty-acre coal fines pile was smoldering and intermittently flaming. The proximity of this fire to the city of Noonan (approximately ½ mile) and several occupied farmsteads constituted a serious danger to public safety. Videotape was made of the site and mailed, overnight express, to the OSM Casper Field Office. With concurrence from OSM, the site was declared an emergency under the state's approved emergency program.

An emergency contract was issued to Walters' Construction of Flaxton, ND. Work consisted of: 1) isolating the burning materials by pushing them into a nearby pit with a bulldozer; and, 2) covering the materials with clay from a nearby spoil pile in order to smother the fire. As the burning coal fines were exposed to air during reclamation, smoke and steam began to billow out and was visible at least five miles from the site. The burning coal fines were more than six feet deep in some areas, making the job difficult and uncomfortable for the contractor. Reclamation was completed on November 25, 1997, one week after initial notification. All burning materials were isolated and covered with a minimum of three feet of clay overburden and the area was rough graded. On December 3, 1997, the contract was closed and payment in the amount of \$1530.00 was approved.

Reclamation of this site required cooperation of state and county emergency management officials, state and local fire marshals, the Office of Surface Mining, the contractor and the landowner. As an interesting footnote, the landowner was in traction following back surgery and right-of-entry documents for the project were signed in his hospital room.

For more information about the North Dakota Public Service Commission and its AML Division, check out our web site at [www.psc.state.nd.us](http://www.psc.state.nd.us).

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