

PRESS RELEASE

Four Managers and Supervisors of Illinois Mine Indicted for Failing to Evacuate Miners During Underground Fire, Conspiracy to Obstruct Investigators, and Falsifying Records

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Ronald Dale Koontz, 69, of Hendersonville, Tennessee, Demitrios George Macropoulos, 38, of Buckeye, Arizona, Randy L. Nowland, 67, of Waltonville, Illinois, and Cory Taylor Humphrey, 37, of Prospect, Kentucky, have been charged with multiple crimes related to an underground fire that occurred in the MC#1 Mine in Franklin County, Illinois, in August 2021.

The indictment returned Tuesday charges Koontz, Macropoulos, Nowland, and Humphrey with conspiring to defraud the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) by concealing the fire and other hazards at the mine and taking steps to interfere with MSHA's investigation of the fire and administration of safety-related orders in the aftermath of the fire. The Indictment charges the defendants with keeping miners underground and continuing to mine coal for all or portions of three shifts while unsuccessfully fighting a fire. The defendants are charged with failing to evacuate the mine and notify MSHA as required by mandatory safety standards under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act (the Mine Act). Nowland and Humphrey are also charged under the Mine Act with falsification of records required to document mine hazards. Koontz and Macropoulos are charged with obstruction of an MSHA proceeding for entering the mine in violation of an MSHA safety order withdrawing miners from the mine. Koontz is further charged with obstruction for directing another supervisor to delete a record reflecting a telephone call he made. A fifth conspirator and former mine manager, Brandon Timothy Parsons, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud MSHA on Aug. 28, 2025 in a related criminal proceeding filed in August 2025.

"As Congress has long recognized, a strong, productive coal industry depends on miners who feel safe and trust that their leaders are not putting them at unnecessary risk," said

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson of the Energy and Natural Resources Division. "Supporting MSHA's work to protect coal miners is an important part of ENRD's mission."

"When people in positions of authority conceal deadly conditions and then cover up their actions, they put lives at risk and prevent federal authorities from doing the job the law requires them to do. That kind of obstruction is unacceptable," said U.S. Attorney Steven D. Weinhoeft for the Southern District of Illinois. "These charges hold accountable those who chose to protect the company's financial interests over the safety of the people they are obligated to protect."

As alleged in the Indictment, in August 2021, Koontz was the general manager of a company that provided oversight and services to the corporate operator of the MC#1 Mine. Macropoulos was the mine superintendent of the MC#1 Mine and Nowland and Humphrey were shift mine managers. On or about the afternoon of Aug. 13, 2021, an underground fire was ignited while mine personnel used cutting torches to cut collapsed steel beams in the mine. According to the Indictment, when the fire could not be extinguished within 10 minutes, rather than implementing the approved Mine Emergency Evacuation and Firefighting Plan, the defendants, and their co-conspirator Parsons, allegedly agreed that they would not evacuate miners or notify MSHA. Instead, the defendants are alleged to have directed coal mining to continue during ad hoc firefighting efforts through the morning of Aug. 14. Nowland and Humphrey are charged with signing records of required mine examinations, falsely certifying that no hazardous conditions existed in the mine.

On August 14th, Parsons tried to conceal the existence of the fire from those not already aware of it by evacuating the mine of hourly employees on the false pretense that a belt used to carry coal from underground to the surface was broken. Members of the conspiracy, including Koontz, Macropoulos, and Parsons, are alleged to have then gone underground to continue their attempts to fight the fire.

Later that morning, MSHA received an anonymous tip about the fire and, by that afternoon, ordered that the mine be evacuated after inspectors confirmed the existence of the fire. Despite the evacuation order, over the next several days, it is alleged that conspirators re-entered the mine in violation of MSHA's order on two occasions to assess the fire and manipulate the conditions underground to fool underground gas detectors so that MSHA would allow mining to resume. When MSHA began collecting portable gas detectors worn by miners during the fire as part of its investigation, a member of the conspiracy allegedly encouraged another co-conspirator to get rid of the portable gas detector he had worn. That co-conspirator concealed his portable gas detector away from the mine.

If convicted, the defendants each face possible incarceration. If found guilty, a federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson of the Justice Department's Energy and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), U.S. Attorney Steven D. Weinhoeft for the Southern District of Illinois, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General Anthony P. D'Esposito, Special Agent in Charge of the DOL-OIG Great Lakes Region Megan Howell, Assistant Director Jose A. Perez of the FBI Criminal Investigative Division, and Special Agent in Charge Ryan Presley of the FBI Springfield Field Office made the announcement.

The Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General and FBI investigated the case.

Senior Trial Attorney Lana N. Pettus of ENRD's Environmental Crimes Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin F. Burke for the Southern District of Illinois are prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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