



# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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## Work to Begin Tomorrow to Extinguish Coal Refuse Fire in Chesterfield County

*Coal Refuse Left from Mining That Occurred in the late 1870's*

**Chesterfield, Va.** – Crews will arrive tomorrow to begin work to extinguish a coal refuse pile fire that is burning in the Winterpock community of Chesterfield County. The fire was first reported on March 8<sup>th</sup>. The Virginia Department of Energy's (Virginia Energy) Abandoned Mine Land (AML) team declared the fire an AML emergency and has hired a contractor to complete the work necessary to put out the fire at the refuse pile. This contractor has experience in extinguishing coal refuse fires.

Several factors had to be considered in finding the solution for extinguishing a coal refuse fire. Virginia Energy's plan will have the contractor remove the burning areas of the pile in phases. Each portion removed will be spread out and sprayed with water. During this process, it may appear there is an increase in smoke coming from the site. That will be steam generated by adding water to the burning material. Removing the material and extinguishing the fire in phases is a slow process and could take three to six days to complete.

While the contractors work, Chesterfield County fire officials and Virginia Energy AML staff will remain on site. Each piece of equipment used in this process has constant air monitoring devices that measure carbon dioxide. There will also be a hazardous gas monitor on site. Should either monitor indicate a rise to unsafe levels, officials will take action for the safety of those working and living nearby.

This coal refuse pile is a result of mining that occurred in the region by Bright Hope Coal Company that was operational in 1877. This specific site was the Beaver Slope Mine. At the time, technology was not available to better separate coal from rock during the mining process. Environmental regulations were also not in place to properly reclaim this material so the spoil that resulted from mining was left in place.

[The Richmond coal basin was an active mining community in the 1700's and 1800's.](#) Several features from that mining still remain in the area. Virginia Energy asks that if you see something you think is associated with historic coal mining to [please contact our agency.](#) We also URGE the public to please stay out of the areas because they can [pose a danger.](#) **In addition, Virginia Energy is requesting the media does not go to the site. Videos and photos of the site and work underway will be gathered by our staff and provided upon request.**

[Virginia Energy's Abandoned AML program](#) was created in 1981 and is federally funded to reclaim issues left behind by coal mining that occurred before 1977. Funding has been limited in the past meaning only the highest priority problems were able to be reclaimed. The projects were a safety threat to residents or had a significant negative environmental impact. The federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will provide Virginia Energy with a substantial increase in funding to do more projects, such as removing coal refuse piles, beginning this spring.