

PRESS RELEASE

Former Manager of Illinois Mine Pleads Guilty to Conspiring to Defraud Mine Safety and Health Administration Regarding Underground Fire

Friday, August 29, 2025

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Timothy Brandon Parsons, 38, of Louisa, Kentucky, entered a guilty plea yesterday to conspiring to defraud the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) in relation to an underground fire that occurred in the MC#1 Mine in Franklin County, Illinois, in August 2021.

According to court documents, on Aug. 12, 2021, Parsons was the Mine Manager at the MC#1 Mine when an underground fire was ignited by a cutting torch used to cut collapsed steel beams. When the fire could not be extinguished within 10 minutes, rather than implementing the approved Mine Emergency Evacuation and Firefighting Plan, Parsons and conspirators agreed that they would not evacuate miners or notify MSHA. Gas detectors carried by miners alarmed for the presence of more than 10 parts per million of carbon monoxide, yet the mine continued to mine coal during ad hoc firefighting efforts over the course of three shifts from Aug. 12 to 13.

On Aug. 13, Parsons tried to conceal the existence of the fire from those not already aware of it by evacuating the mine on the false pretense that a belt used to carry coal from underground to the surface was broken. Later that morning, MSHA received an anonymous tip about the fire and then later ordered that the mine be evacuated after inspectors confirmed the existence of the fire. Despite the evacuation order, over the next several days, conspirators re-entered the mine on two occasions without MSHA's permission to assess the fire and manipulate the conditions underground so that MSHA would allow mining to resume. Members of the conspiracy did not wear tracking devices designed to track the underground location of miners and made false entries in mine records.

Sentencing is scheduled for Dec. 18. Parsons faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine up to \$250,000. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), U.S. Attorney Steven D. Weinhoeft for the Southern District of Illinois, Assistant Director Jose A. Perez of the FBI Criminal Investigative Division, and Special Agent in Charge Christopher J. S. Johnson of the FBI's Springfield Field Office made the announcement.

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

Senior Trial Attorney Matthew T. Morris of ENRD's Environmental Crimes Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin F. Burke for the Southern District of Illinois are prosecuting the case.

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