

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

District 2

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
(PREPARATION PLANT)

FATAL FALL OF PERSON ACCIDENT

Russelton Mine (ID No. 36 00808)  
BCNR Mining Corporation  
Russelton, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Injured: June 8, 1984  
Died: June 9, 1984

by

Gerald F. Moody, Jr.  
Coal Mine Safety and Health Inspector

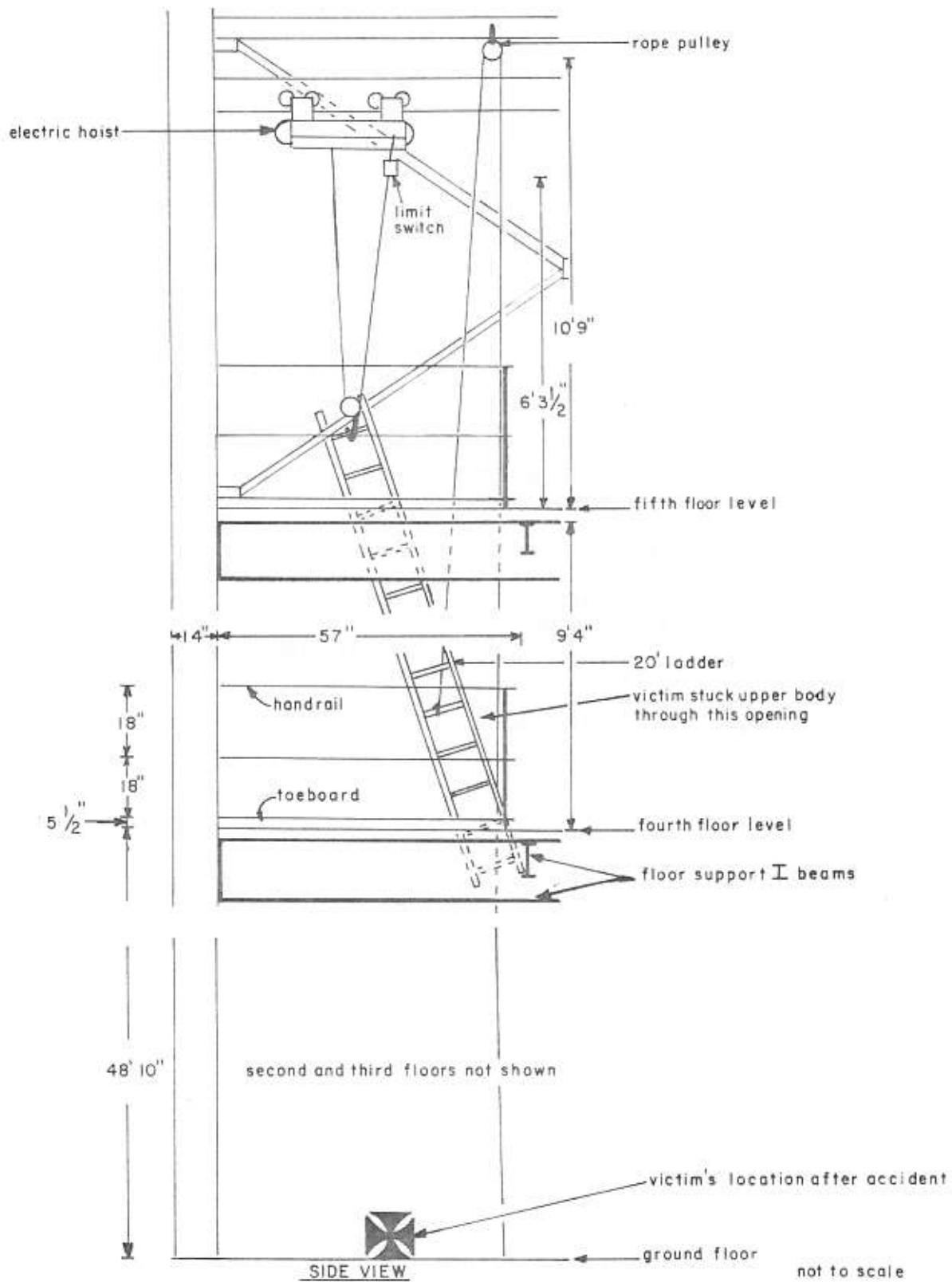
Originating Office - Mine Safety and Health Administration  
200 James Place, Monroeville, Pennsylvania 15146  
Joseph J. Garcia, Subdistrict Manager

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SKETCH OF FATAL FALL OF PERSON ACCIDENT  
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**Authority**—This report is based on an investigation made pursuant to the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, Public Law 95-173, as amended by Public Law 95-164.

**Section A—Identification Data**

|                                                             |                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Title of investigation:<br>Fatal Fall of Person Accident | 2. Date MSHA investigation started:<br>June 8, 1984 |
| 3. Report release date:<br>August 27, 1984                  | 4. Mine:<br>Russellton                              |
| 5. Mine ID number:<br>36 00808                              | 6. Company:<br>BCNR Mining Corporation              |
| 7. Town, County, State:<br>Russellton, Allegheny County, PA | 8. Author(s):<br>Gerald F. Moody, Jr.               |

**Section B—Mine Information**

|                                              |                                         |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 9. Daily production:<br>0                    | 10. Surface employment:<br>26           |
| 11. Underground employment:<br>4             | 12. Name of coalbed:<br>Double Freeport |
| 13. Thickness of coalbed:<br>48 to 84 inches |                                         |

**Section C—Last Quarter Injury Frequency Rate (HSAC) for:**

|                                       |                                 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 14. Industry:<br>7.67                 | 15. This operation:<br>0.00     |
| 16. Training program approved:<br>Yes | 17. Mine Profile Rating:<br>DNA |

**Section D—Originating Office**

|                                                                                           |                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 18. Mine Safety and Health Administration<br>Coal Mine Health and Safety District No. : 2 | Address: 200 James Place<br>Monroeville, PA 15146 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|

**Section E—Abstract**

On Friday, June 8, 1984, at about 9:30 p.m., a fall of person accident occurred at the preparation plant of BCNR Mining Corporation's Russellton mine, inflicting injuries to Howard K. Wilhelm, Jr., repairman—first class. Wilhelm, age 53, had 12 years 9 months mining experience with the last 4 months as a repairman. The accident occurred when a ladder, being hoisted from the ground floor with an electric hoist became wedged between steel beams on the fourth and fifth floors of the plant. Wilhelm leaned out between the top and middle rails around an opening in the fourth floor and began pushing on the ladder. As the ladder became free, he lost his balance and fell to the concrete ground floor. As a result of his injuries, Wilhelm died at 12:20 a.m., on Saturday, June 9, 1984. Cause of death was multiple blunt force trauma of the trunk, head and limbs.

The accident occurred because work was being performed in a hazardous location and a safety belt and line was not being used where there was a danger of falling.

**Section F—Mine Organization**

| Company officials:          | Name                           | Address                                                               |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19. President               | G. P. McBride                  | P.O. Box 500, 455 Race Track Road<br>Meadow Lands, Pennsylvania 15347 |
| 20. Safety Supervisor       | Henry M. Pollick, Jr.          | P.O. Box 500, 455 Race Track Road<br>Meadow Lands, Pennsylvania 15347 |
| 21. General Mine Foreman    | Raymond Newcomer               | P.O. Box 308<br>Russellton, Pennsylvania 15076                        |
| 22.                         |                                |                                                                       |
| 23. Labor Organization:     | United Mine Workers of America |                                                                       |
| 24. Chairman—H&S Committee: | George R. Olar                 | 1320 McArthur Drive<br>Russellton, Pennsylvania 15076                 |

### Commentary

On Friday, June 8, 1984, at about 4 p.m., the preparation plant maintenance crew under the supervision of Arthur J. Colland, Shift Foreman, began their assigned duties within the plant. At about 9:10 p.m., Colland instructed Wilhelm to help Larry Kerleski, repairman-first class, remove a pan in the cone classifier, bring a 20-foot long ladder to the fourth floor and begin relining the inside of the cone. After removing the pan in the cone classifier, Wilhelm went to the ground floor and hooked a 20-foot long ladder onto a wire rope for the electric material hoist. Kerleski, operating the hoist controls from the fifth floor, raised the ladder until the electric hoist was stopped by the wire rope limit switch. At this point, the top of the ladder was about 6 feet above the fifth floor level and bottom of the ladder was 3 to 4 feet below the fourth floor level. Kerleski went to the fourth floor level, laced a hemp rope through the sixth rung and attached it to the fifth rung from the bottom of the ladder. Wilhelm, who had proceeded to the fourth floor, pulled on the rope, but could not raise the ladder high enough to get the bottom of it over the railing. Wilhelm then lowered the ladder with the electric hoist while Kerleski pulled on the rope to move the bottom of the ladder. During this time the ladder became wedged between a steel beam that supported the fourth floor and an angle beam between vertical beams on the fifth floor. (See sketch). Wilhelm went to the fifth floor and started to go out onto a horizontal beam over the opening to free the wedged ladder. Kerleski saw this and told him not to go out on the beam. Wilhelm returned to the fourth floor and both men tried several unsuccessful attempts to free the ladder by pushing on it with their hands or feet. Kerleski returned to the fifth floor and tried to move the ladder with the hoist, but the ladder would not move.

At about 9:30 p.m., Wilhelm leaned out between the top and middle rails around the fourth floor opening and began pushing on the ladder with one hand while he held onto the toeboard with the other hand. The ladder became free, Wilhelm lost his balance and fell to the concrete ground floor. Kerleski summoned help from other workmen in the plant and proceeded to the ground floor. The West Deer Township Ambulance Company was notified and arrived at the preparation plant at about 9:45 p.m. Emergency treatment was administered to Wilhelm and at about 10:10 p.m., the Life Flight helicopter arrived and transported Wilhelm to the Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wilhelm died at 12:20 a.m., on Saturday, June 9, 1984. Cause of death was multiple blunt force trauma of the trunk, head and limbs.

### Discussion and Evaluation

The investigation revealed the following factors relevant to the occurrence of the accident:

1. The preparation plant was a multi-story structure of steel and concrete, covered with corrugated metal and built in 1947. Coal from Russellton and Newfield mines was processed at the plant until it was shutdown in November 1982. The plant remained idle until February 1984, when coal processing operations resumed on the day (8 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.) shift and maintenance was performed on the afternoon (4 p.m. to 11:15 p.m.) shift.

2. An opening of 71 inches by 13 feet 4 inches was provided at each floor level above the ground floor. The opening was used to raise and lower materials inside the plant. Steel handrails, about 42 inches in height, were provided at the perimeter of each floor opening. These handrails consisted of a 1-inch diameter rod on top and another rod 18 inches below, with a toeboard 5-1/2 inches in height, 18 inches below the middle rail. Hinged gates, 44 inches to 5 feet 5 inches in width, 42 inches in height and constructed of steel plate or angle iron and stainless steel screens were built into the railing around the opening. The height from the fourth to fifth floors was about 9 feet 4 inches.

3. Materials were raised through the floor openings with a rope and pulley or a Shepard Niles, 3-ton capacity, 440-volt alternating current electric hoist with a 3/8-inch wire rope. The rope pulley was attached to a beam 10 feet 9 inches above the fifth floor and the electric hoist was attached to another beam 9 feet 8 inches above the fifth floor. The height from the fifth floor to the hoist rope electric limit switch was 6 feet 3-1/2 inches. (See sketch).

4. According to Kerleski, this was the first time he had hoisted a 20-foot long ladder to the fourth floor. He used the electric hoist because he felt the ladder was too heavy to hoist with the hemp rope and pulley. The ladder was raised vertically until the electric hoist limit switch stopped the hoist; however, there was 3 to 4 feet of the ladder below the fourth floor level. After Kerleski attached the hemp rope near the bottom of the ladder, he and Wilhelm tried to maneuver the ladder so that it could be unloaded at the fourth floor level. This maneuvering continued until the ladder became wedged. After several unsuccessful attempts to free the wedged ladder, Wilhelm leaned out between the top and middle rails around the fourth floor opening and began pushing on the ladder with one hand while holding onto a toeboard with the other hand. As the ladder became free, Wilhelm fell 48 feet 10 inches to the concrete ground floor.

5. Conversations with other plant personnel revealed that whenever they found it necessary to hoist a ladder to the various floor levels in the plant, they used the rope and pulley. Several plant personnel demonstrated how they used the rope and pulley to hoist the ladder to the fourth floor without exposing themselves over the floor opening. Plant personnel also stated that when working inside the cone, they wore a safety belt and line.

6. According to Joseph Walko, Preparation Plant Foreman, a 3-foot long metal hook bar, provided about 20 feet away from the fourth floor opening, was used to grab motors, pipes, ladders, etc., and pull them from the opening onto the floor. A safety belt and line was provided in a locker located in an office on the ground floor and this office was open to plant employees.

7. Training records indicated that on February 20, 1984, Wilhelm received task training for a repairman-first class. Walko stated that this training included a Job-Safety Analysis (JSA) in the use of safety belt and line where there was a danger of falling.

Findings of Fact

The victim was not wearing a safety belt and line when he placed his body between the top and middle rails around an opening in the fourth floor of the preparation plant. The victim was attempting to free a ladder wedged between beams inside the opening and when the ladder became free, he lost his balance and fell to the concrete ground floor. A violation of Section 77.1710(g).

Conclusion

The accident occurred because work was being performed in a hazardous location and a safety belt and line was not being used where there was a danger of falling.

Approved by:

*Joseph J. Garcia*

Joseph J. Garcia  
Subdistrict Manager--Coal Mine  
Safety and Health District 2

*Gerald F. Moody, Jr.*

Gerald F. Moody, Jr.

*Donald W. Huntley*

Donald W. Huntley  
District Manager--Coal Mine  
Safety and Health District 2

Appendix

List of persons furnishing information and/or present during the investigation.

BCNR Mining Corporation Officials

|                    |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Joseph J. Walko    | General Preparation Plant Foreman |
| Arthur J. Colland  | Shift Foreman                     |
| Ray Newcomer       | General Mine Foreman              |
| Jack Conner        | Superintendent of Safety          |
| Henry Pollick, Jr. | Safety Supervisor                 |
| Henry Pollick, Sr. | Superintendent                    |
| Charles Rosewell   | Safety Supervisor                 |
| Roberta Yinger     | Personnel Supervisor              |
| William Maxwell    | Surface Foreman                   |

BCNR Mining Corporation Employees

|                   |                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Larry R. Kerleski | Repairman - First Class (Eyewitness) |
| Henry Eckenrod    | Cone Operator                        |
| Stanley Troyak    | Repairman - First Class              |
| William Bialas    | Trimmer                              |

Family of Victim

|             |         |
|-------------|---------|
| Ron Wilhelm | Brother |
|-------------|---------|

Representatives of Miners

|                   |                                                                        |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Denny J. Swigart  | Health and Safety Representative,<br>U.M.W.A.                          |
| Henry L. Decker   | President, Local Union No. 3506,<br>U.M.W.A.                           |
| Rich Olar         | Vice President, Local Union No. 3506,<br>U.M.W.A.                      |
| Edward P. Lorrie  | Member, Health and Safety Committee,<br>Local Union No. 3506, U.M.W.A. |
| Thomas P. Letunik | Member, Health and Safety Committee,<br>Local Union No. 3506, U.M.W.A. |
| Louis J. Maholic  | Member, Local Union No. 3506, U.M.W.A.                                 |

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources

|                      |                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| James G. Richards    | Bituminous Underground Inspector     |
| Domineck F. Sabatini | Bituminous Underground Inspector     |
| Michael D. Scarton   | Bituminous Mine Electrical Inspector |

Mine Safety and Health Administration

|                      |                                       |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| John E. Chambers     | Coal Mine Safety and Health Inspector |
| Dennis J. Swentosky  | Coal Mine Safety and Health Inspector |
| Richard J. Zilka     | Coal Mine Safety and Health Inspector |
| Gerald F. Moody, Jr. | Coal Mine Safety and Health Inspector |





Section A—Victim Data

|                                                                                |  |                                                                                    |                                            |                                             |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Name<br>Howard K. Wilhelm                                                   |  | 2. Sex<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female |                                            | 3. Social Security Number<br>[REDACTED]     |  |
| 4. Age<br>53                                                                   |  | 5. Job Classification<br>Repairman-1st Class                                       |                                            |                                             |  |
| 6. Experience at this Classification<br>4 months                               |  |                                                                                    | 7. Total Mining Experience<br>12-3/4 years |                                             |  |
| 8. What activity was being performed at time of accident?<br>Hoisting material |  | 9. Victim's Experience at this Activity<br>4 months                                |                                            | 10. Was victim trained in this task?<br>Yes |  |

Section B—Victim Data for Health and Safety Courses/Training Received (related to accident)

|                                         | Date Received |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|
| 11. Newly Employed, Experienced Miner   | 2/17/84       |
| 12. Repairman-1st Class (Task Training) | 2/20/84       |
| 13.                                     |               |
| 14.                                     |               |

Section C—Supervisor Data (supervisor of victim)

|                                         |  |                                                                                      |  |
|-----------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 15. Name<br>Arthur J. Colland           |  | 16. Certified<br><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |  |
| 17. Experience as Supervisor<br>5 years |  | 18. Total Mining Experience<br>5 years                                               |  |

Section D—Supervisor Data for Health and Safety Courses/Training Received (related to accident)

|                                       | Date Received |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 19. Newly Employed, Experienced Miner | 2/17/84       |
| 20.                                   |               |
| 21.                                   |               |
| 22.                                   |               |

|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 23. When was the supervisor last present at accident scene prior to the accident?<br>20-25 minutes | 24. What did he do when he was there?<br>Instructed victim and coworker to bring ladder to fourth floor and remove pan from inside cone. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                     |                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 25. When was he last in contact with the victim?<br>About 9:10 a.m. | 26. Did he issue instructions relative to the accident?<br>Bring ladder to fourth floor and remove pan from inside cone |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

27. Was he aware of or did he express an awareness of any unsafe practice or condition?  
No

Section I (Coal Only)

MSHA and/or State Certification and/or Qualification

Mine ID 36 00808

Date Training Plan Approved 4/27/79 Revised 3/13/84 Date Training Received \_\_\_\_\_ Date Training Received \_\_\_\_\_

- \*  Certified Person (Underground) \_\_\_\_\_  Dust (Sampling) \_\_\_\_\_
- \*  Certified Person (Surface) \_\_\_\_\_  Dust (Calibration) \_\_\_\_\_
- \*  Methane & Oxygen Deficiency Testing \_\_\_\_\_  Noise \_\_\_\_\_
- \*  Electrical \_\_\_\_\_ \*  Impoundments \_\_\_\_\_
- \*  Energized Surface High Voltage \_\_\_\_\_ \*  Hoisting Engineer \_\_\_\_\_

\* Annual Retraining Required

Section II (Metal-Non-metal and Coal)

MSHA Training Programs Completed

Date of Hire 6/15/70 Date Training Plan Approved 4/27/79 Revised 3/13/84

- | Required Training (Victim)                                            | Date Training Received | <input type="checkbox"/> Required Training (Victim) | Date Training Received |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Miner (U.B.)                             | _____                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hazard Training (U.G.)     | _____                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Miner (Sur.)                             | _____                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Hazard Training (Sur.)     | _____                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newly Employed Experienced (U.G.)            | _____                  |                                                     |                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Newly Employed Experienced (Sur.) | <u>2/17/84</u>         | Task Training Specify Type:                         |                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Refresher (U.G.)                      | _____                  | <u>Repairmen-1st Class</u>                          | <u>2/20/84</u>         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Refresher (Sur.)                      | _____                  | _____                                               | _____                  |
|                                                                       |                        | _____                                               | _____                  |
|                                                                       |                        | _____                                               | _____                  |

Section III

Company Training Program Completed:

| Training | OJT/Formal | Instructor | Date Completed |
|----------|------------|------------|----------------|
| _____    | _____      | _____      | _____          |
| _____    | _____      | _____      | _____          |
| _____    | _____      | _____      | _____          |

Section IV

DID VICTIM HAVE TRAINING SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE TASK BEING PERFORMED  
AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT?

YES     NO    WHEN? 2/20/84

BY WHOM? J. J. Walko    HOW WAS TRAINING GIVEN? Classroom and in  
Plant

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Section V

RECOMMEND TRAINING PLAN EVALUATION BY EDUCATION & TRAINING OFFICE

YES     NO

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