



Todd Domboski looks at the hole he fell through.

Boy rescued from mine fire hole

CENTRALIA, Pa. (AP) — Tempests flared here Saturday after townspeople learned that a boy narrowly escaped serious injury when he fell through an opening created by a smoldering underground mine fire.

"It's a horror story, it really is, and the government has sat on its hands," said schoolteacher Bob Godinski. "We literally have a disaster here and the state and federal governments refuse to recognize it."

Godinski and others were shocked when they learned that 12-year-old Todd Domboski fell through the opening Saturday morning while playing in his grandmother's yard, but was rescued by his teenage nephew.

The boy told authorities he noticed smoke rising from the ground in the yard. When he went

to look at it, his foot broke through the surface, the ground opened up and he slipped through, dropping about 6 feet before he was able to grab some tree roots.

"If he didn't have a red hunting cap on, I wouldn't have found him," said Eric Wolfgang, who pulled the stunned boy to safety.

Todd was taken to Ashland Hospital where he was tested for inhalation of carbon monoxide fumes and released.

The fire, which started in an underground vein of coal, has been burning below this Columbia County community of 1,000 since 1962.

Todd is the first person known to have fallen through an opening, although smoke is often seen rising from holes in the ground.

Officials of the state Department of Environmental Resources took a temperature reading of 350 degrees in the hole.

Neighbors, looking at the 2-foot hole after the rescue, tossed a brick down the shaft to see how deep it was.

"It was quite a few seconds before we heard the brick hit bottom," Godinski said. "The hole is fairly deep."

"The boy was very lucky," said John Cottingham, the owner of a gas station that was forced to close last year because the mine fire threatened its underground gasoline storage tanks.

State and federal agencies have spent an estimated \$3 million during the last 10 years, trying various methods of putting out the fire.

"The governor ought to declare this a disaster area," said Godinski. "We spend millions of dollars on refugees and boat people, but they won't do anything about their own people."

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Wed, Dec 16, 2020