

# Inspectors probe coal pile collapse which killed five

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State mining officials say they are mystified about what caused a 10,000-ton coal pile to collapse, killing five men.

State Energy Department Deputy Bart Lay said testimony from Friday's hearing conflicts with the initial theory that the weight of the men caused a hole within the pile to collapse around them.

Lay told WBOY-TV after Friday's hearing at the Consolidation Coal Co. mine that plant workers said the 40-foot high coal pile had supported a heavy bulldozer the night before.

"To me, if a bulldozer doesn't break through, surely five men are not going to fall through," Lay said.

An official with the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration said the collapse may have been caused by workers opening up a hatch underneath the 40-foot pile to dump the coal onto a conveyor belt.

However, "witnesses claim they hadn't run the feeder system under

the part where the men went through," Lay said. "That's not quite clear."

Lay said he hoped further testimony would shed more light on the cause of the accident.

All five men were pronounced dead at the scene after workers pulled them from the coal pile, authorities said. The victims were inspecting a cylindrical stacker outside Consolidation's Loveridge preparation plant when the accident occurred just before 11 a.m. Thursday.

The victims were identified as Joseph E. Dunn, 50 of Pittsburgh; Joseph W. Leonard, 29 of Morgantown; Roger B. Alke, 33 of Morgantown; Ronald Bell, 39 of Fairmont and David Kovach, 41 of Fairmont.

Company officials had speculated immediately after the accident that a "space" might have caused the pile to shift and cause the coal slide. Mine safety officials said, however, that controls were activated accidentally starting a conveyor into motion underneath that stockpile.