



Fire Underground: The Ongoing Tragedy of the Centralia Mine Fire

David DeKok

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How a modern-day mine disaster has turned a Pennsylvania community into a ghost town

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For much of its history, Centralia, Pennsylvania, had a population of around 2,000. By 1981, this had dwindled to just over 1,000—not unusual for a onetime mining town. But as of 2007, Centralia had the unwelcome distinction of being the state’s tiniest municipality, with a population of nine. The reason: an underground fire that began in 1962 has decimated the town with smoke and toxic gases, and has since made history.

Fire Underground is the completely updated classic account of the fire that has been raging under Centralia for decades. David DeKok tells the story of how the fire actually began and how government officials failed to take effective action. By 1981 the fire was spewing deadly gases into homes. A twelve-year-old boy dropped into a steaming hole as a congressman toured nearby. DeKok describes how the people of Centralia banded together to finally win relocation funds—and he reveals what has happened to the few remaining residents as the fiftieth anniversary of the fire’s beginning nears.

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