

# Mettiki shifting coal mining operations to West Virginia

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RED HOUSE — Mettiki Coal LLC is closing its Maryland mining operations, but that doesn't mean the company is pulling out of Garrett County or that any jobs with the mining company will be lost.

"The coal reserves are depleted," Frank Schad, manager of administration and planning at Mettiki, said. "It's been in the planning horizon for many years, and in knowing that, that's why we have developed our Mountain View mine in Tucker County, W.Va., as the next operation."

With the depletion of the coal resources, Mettiki Coal will shut down the mining operation that began in 1977 by the end of October.

Schad added that the preparation plant, which cleans and prepares the coal for use, will continue its operation in Garrett County, and Mettiki's main office will remain in Maryland. Mining, Schad said, will continue in much the same way as it has before, with the same techniques and workers. The coal seam they will be mining in West Virginia is the same one they have been mining in Maryland.

"We have been mining in West Virginia for a little over a year," Jody Theriot, manager of safety and human resources, said. "We've been using the mine equipment and people over there incrementally."

Schad said that Mettiki plans to maintain a constant employment level, with no jobs lost for its approximately 225 employees, and the possibility for a few additional employment opportunities.

Garrett County Administrator Monty Pagenhardt said the shift to West Virginia should not affect the tax base greatly or the partnership between the county and Mettiki mine to bring water lines to the Gorman and Table Rock areas.

"Some of the jobs will remain in the county," Pagenhardt said. "Payroll tax and income tax will still come to Maryland. The buildings and facilities are still there. The largest percentage of real estate tax the company pays is through the preparation plant."

There could be a decrease in the coal tax, Pagenhardt said, with the actual mining no longer taking place in Maryland. The decrease could be noticeable as Mettiki had provided more than half of the coal produced in Allegany and Garrett counties combined last year.

Despite the halt on mining, Schad said Mettiki is committed to fulfilling its requirements through the Maryland Bureau of Mines and to the people in the surrounding Gorman and Table Rock areas.

"We are responsible to fix and restore/repair anything that our mining operation affects as far as structures or water sources," Schad said. "I would expect that by the end of next summer for sure, any uses that relate to the mining process here in Maryland will have been resolved."

This means that Mettiki will still provide the water line that would connect to the present water system at Table Rock Road and George Washington Highway, including a portion of Fairview Church Road and also cover the cost of hookup to this system for properties with water sources affected by the mining operations.

"Mettiki wanted to get the water lines," Pagenhardt said, "they are required to do that, and are trying to get that finalized before they move or about the time of their move."

Schad said that the company will continue to monitor and maintain all environmental aspects. He added that they are not pulling out of the county.

"The mining operation itself is moving," Schad said. "The company is not leaving. We're still here."

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