

SAPPHIRE COAL CO TO LAYOFF 163



The odds are good that you, like most of us, do not give too much of a thought to where our power comes from. If you live in an area serviced by a coal fired power plant then it comes from miners dragging the ore out of the ground. If you don't work in the industry then you don't really know about the Sapphire Coal Co. and its parent company the much larger United Coal Company LLC. For those of you not familiar with United Coal Company LLC here is a look at how the company **describes itself**: "United Coal Company LLC is the original foundation of The United Company and is proud of a long history of success while taking a different approach to the coal industry. Started in 1970, United Coal became one of the nation's largest coal exporters in the '90s. United Coal's "different approach" included deploying an aggressive growth strategy by purchasing other coal companies and reinvesting our profits during the coal boom. When other companies viewed the coal safety regulations as obstacles, United Coal's management team saw them as opportunities. ... Our company now has the coal subsidiaries of Carter Roag Coal Company in Elkins, W.Va.; Sapphire Coal Company in Whitesburg, Ky.; Pocahontas Coal Company in Beckley, W.Va.; and Wellmore Coal Company LLC, in Big Rock, Va. " Well it looks like that strategy really isn't that different from most other companies. When things get tough the company is issuing pink slips to its staff. The company will be closing up operations at its Advantage mine operation and putting 163 workers out of a job. These 163 jobs represent all of the workers who were employed at the facility currently. These cuts are large enough to qualify as a mass layoff action and while that may be very bad news for these Kentucky workers and the surrounding area, it has pushed the layoffs back for a few weeks. The layoffs will not go into effect until the 16th of June. So the workers will have some chance to find other work before they are completely out of a job. The prospects however are fairly grim if you believe local sources. One [reporter for Kentucky.com](#) had a chance to talk to Whitesburg Mayor James Wiley Craft about how he sees these layoffs impacting his community, which is in very close proximity to the mine. He said the following: "Whitesburg, as well as other towns around us, are so totally dependent on the mining industry, and when 163 men are permanently laid off, it becomes a real, real problem. We don't have any other industry, particularly here in Letcher County, for them to seek employment at other than government. And for the last month, I've had one or two people every day ask me if the city has any openings at all for employment." So for the time being it looks like things are going to be rough. The plant is attributing the move to marketing conditions, including an exceptionally mild winter that resulted in less power usage.

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