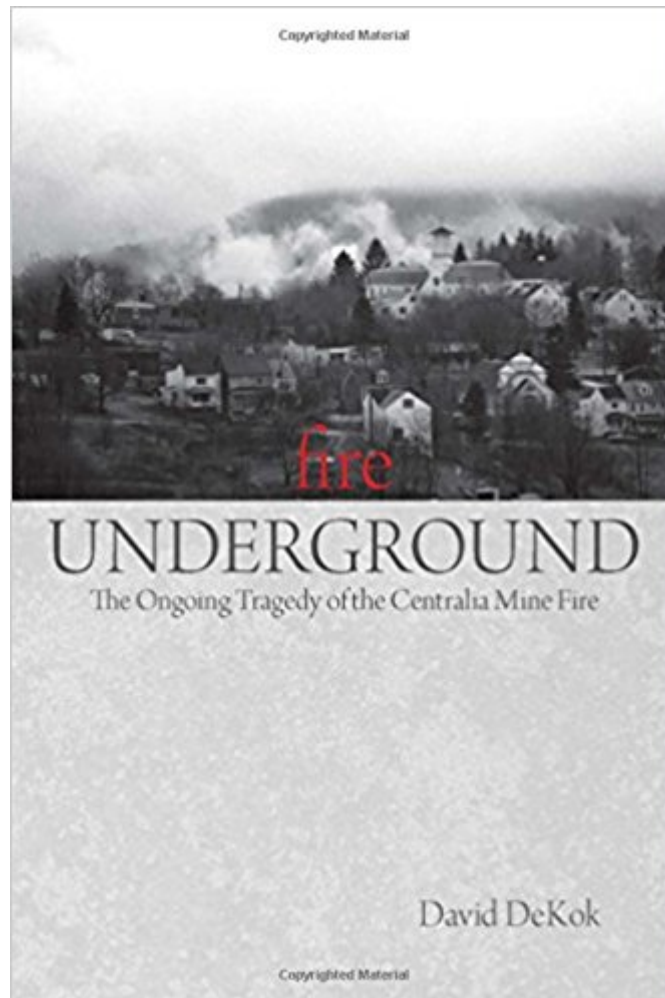




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# **Fire Underground: The Ongoing Tragedy Of The Centralia Mine Fire**



## Synopsis

How a modern-day mine disaster has turned a Pennsylvania community into a ghost town \* For much of its history, Centralia, Pennsylvania, had a population of around 2,000. By 1981, this had dwindled to just over 1,000—â€¢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—â€¢and he reveals what has happened to the few remaining residents as the fiftieth anniversary of the fire's beginning nears.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for the author's previous book, Fire Underground—â€¢“Enough bureaucratic villains to fill a Dickens novel.”—â€¢New York Times Book Review —â€¢DeKok has not only reported and written a compelling first-hand account of how an underground fire destroyed Centralia, but he even gives us an anatomy of how the disaster happened and analyzes its implications for one community, and in a sense for all of us. A thoughtful and thoroughly engrossing

read! • Lisa Scottoline, author of *Dirty Blonde*, a fictional story about Centralia "An excellent, unbiased chronicle devoid of the emotionalism which set resident upon resident." Library Journal (for the book as previously titled, *Unseen Danger*)

Centralia, Pennsylvania, lived and died by anthracite coal. The town's population peaked at 2,761 in 1890, but by 1981 had dwindled to just over 1,000 • not unusual for a Pennsylvania mining town. But today Centralia has no more than a dozen inhabitants, and they are expected to be gone before long. The reason: an underground fire that has burned since 1962 in the labyrinth of abandoned coal mines beneath Centralia, making parts of the town uninhabitable. By 1981 the fire was sending deadly gases into homes, making children sick, and one day a twelve-year-old boy dropped into a steaming hole and almost died as a U.S. congressman toured nearby. David DeKok describes how the fire began and how the majority of Centralia residents fought for and finally obtained relocation from the town, even as some of their neighbors claimed there was no threat. He reveals what happened to the few remaining diehards as the fiftieth anniversary of the fire's beginning nears.

I decided recently to do a photo essay on Centralia, and so I wanted to learn as much as I could about the town before starting the project. Mr. DeKok's book was the first I read, and set a very high bar for those that followed. He's covered the story of Centralia since the late 1970s. He lives in the area. This man knows what he's talking about, and backs it all up with facts. It's packed to the gills with information, but reads like a thriller. I couldn't put it down. I initially borrowed the book from my local library, but after checking it out three times to double-check information and re-read passages, I felt like I was stealing, and so I bought a copy of my own from . I've since re-read the entire book cover-to-cover in preparation for a return visit. Anyone with a love for history will appreciate this book, but if you're planning on visiting Centralia, you're doing yourself a disservice if you don't read this. It completely changed how I approached my project, and will no doubt enhance your visit as well.

I should start this review by saying that this is among the most well-researched books I have ever read. This book is clearly the result of years of hard labor on the author's part. Unfortunately, that doesn't translate into a gripping read. I am a huge fan of historical non-fiction, and while the topic of this book is interesting, it is not a book for someone who prefers his or her non-fiction to read like a thriller. I think this book is a required read for residents of Centralia and the surrounding areas,

people with a technical interest in mining, and anyone who works for a government agency. It is probably one of the most horrifying (but unfortunately true) tales of government buck-passing, pissing matches, red tape, and disregard for working class people I've ever read. All that being said, the book is not a fast-paced read. It moves slowly, gets bogged down in technical detail about the mine fire and the various attempts to contain it, and becomes a confused mass of government employees, politicians, and Centralia citizens. I would not recommend this book for the casual historical non-fiction enthusiast, but it does have great value for people looking to read about the devastating effects of government inaction.

It was an interesting story but had a lot of repetition in it. However it was a very detailed explanation of Centralia and the ongoing fire and the efforts of the town. The Kindle ebook format was a little weird at times (random spaces between words and unable to see how much time is left for a chapter but that's not the author's fault). I'd still recommend reading the book.

I live in PA about 50 miles from Centralia where this fiasco took place. It is a true story. I was very young when this began. During my life there were occasional local newspaper articles about what has been done, and how the fire started. The book digs into the background on the political goings-on and the efforts that were done in futile attempts to put the fire out. The book describes the affect the fire had on the lives of the people whose homes were in the vicinity of the underground coal fire.

This book provides a detailed description of the events and the people of Centralia during this disaster. The fire details are just general but the fight among the residents on how to combat the fire and deal with the state and federal governments are the most interesting parts. It is a story of environmental justice, or the lack of it. Other fires in Pennsylvania, in larger, more well-to-do areas received greater attention.

Fascinating! VERY thorough research, and well restrained personal commentary. He mostly lets the facts speak for themselves but is in no way boring. The books talks plenty of the well-known issues, but gives depth that you won't find anywhere else. You can tell he's got years of research behind the facts. Dates, names and other specifics that support everything. Dense, but not overwhelming. Very easy to read. Highly recommended.

I have always wanted to know what transpired that lead to the horrific event in Centralia. It is a haunting story. The people of that small village have had so much to endure, and the outcome of their leaving their homes was grave. I realize that there have been mine fires everywhere, but this one is like trying to kill the devil, himself. Mr. DeKok has written an excellent overview of the events leading up to and leaving off with the fire still burning. I enjoyed this historical Pennsylvania tragedy.

Love this book! It's so well written and it's had me hooked.

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