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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY

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Andrew Turnbull Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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7 September 1984

Dear Andrew

SPRINGHILL OPENCAST SITE

I am writing to let you know of a new development at the Springhill Opencast Site. The National Coal Board have just told us that in spite of preventive measures heating has developed in one of the three stock piles at the site, which contains 63,000 tons of coal. The only way to deal effectively with the situation is to remove the coal.

As you know, the NCB have already informed Staffordshire County Council that in their view the absence of rail transport from the site has created an emergency which would justify them in moving coal from the site by road under the condition attached to the authorisation to work the site. The Board now propose to inform the County Council this morning that heating has developed, adding a new and very urgent element to their case that there is an emergency justifying the use of road transport. They will tell the Council that they intend to move coal from the site urgently and will seek the Council's immediate view on how this can be done by road with least effect on the local environment.

We have informed the Department of Transport of the new development, and they have at our request agreed to contact British Rail to see whether the new situation provides an argument which might persuade signalmen to remove the embargo on rail movement from the site. If this were successful, the intention would be to use both rail and road movement in the short term to move the coal.

The NCB have to identify at short notice hauliers ready to provide lorries which can move coal in this condition. The CEGB for their part have already told us that they are ready and able to take this coal.

These developments may if all goes well lead to early movement of coal from the Springhill site. It remains to be seen whether, if the coal which is over-heating is moved, it will prove possible to move the remainder of the stock without new obstacles.

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However, we shall still need to resolve without delay the legal debate in which we have been engaged, since the planning permissions governing other sites from which the NCB may need to move coal do not contain the same condition explicitly permitting movement other than by rail in the case of emergency.

I am copying this letter to John Ballard (Environment), Dinah Nichols (Transport) and Henry Steel (Attorney General's Office).

Yours sincerely

Michael Heseltine

M F REIDY
Private Secretary

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