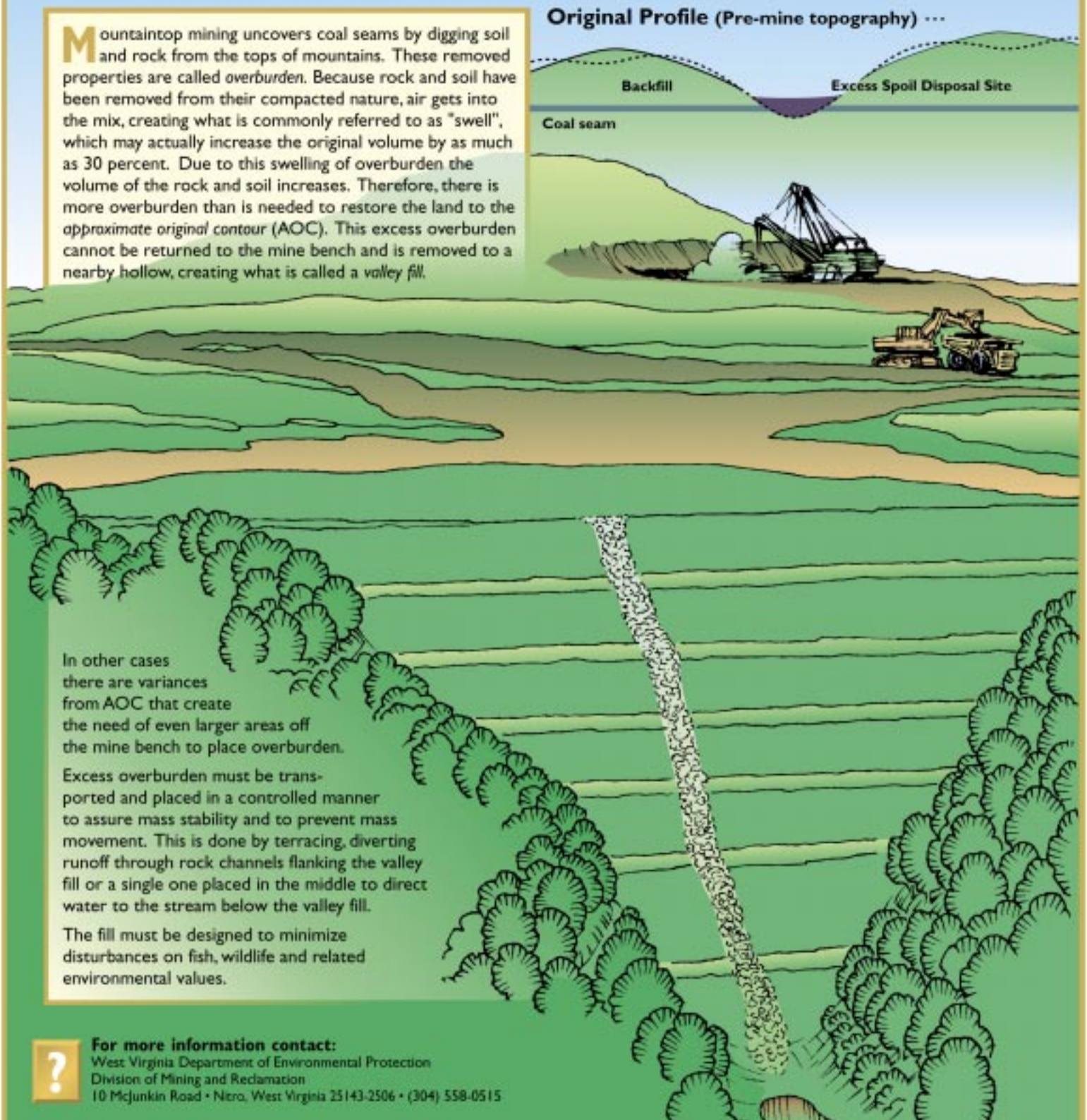
West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection/Division of Mining & Reclamation

Enviro FACTSHEET

MOUNTAINTOP MINING & Valley Fills

Mountaintop mining uncovers coal seams by digging soil and rock from the tops of mountains. These removed properties are called *overburden*. Because rock and soil have been removed from their compacted nature, air gets into the mix, creating what is commonly referred to as "swell", which may actually increase the original volume by as much as 30 percent. Due to this swelling of overburden the volume of the rock and soil increases. Therefore, there is more overburden than is needed to restore the land to the *approximate original contour* (AOC). This excess overburden cannot be returned to the mine bench and is removed to a nearby hollow, creating what is called a *valley fill*.



In other cases there are variances from AOC that create the need of even larger areas off the mine bench to place overburden.

Excess overburden must be transported and placed in a controlled manner to assure mass stability and to prevent mass movement. This is done by terracing, diverting runoff through rock channels flanking the valley fill or a single one placed in the middle to direct water to the stream below the valley fill.

The fill must be designed to minimize disturbances on fish, wildlife and related environmental values.

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