THE NOISE EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S. -- WHERE TO FROM HERE?

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Good Morning. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge:

1. Our workshop organizers, NIOSH, for hosting this important Mining Hearing Loss Prevention Workshop;
2. The Coal Noise Partnership for co-sponsoring this workshop to raise awareness about the prevention of noise-induced hearing loss;
3. Our presenters and panelists for sharing their knowledge and experiences in practical solutions and innovations for noise control; and lastly,
4. Our audience, whose presence here demonstrates a common concern for the prevalence of hearing loss in the mining industry and a common purpose in seeking solutions to protect miners' health and hearing.

It has been close to 5 years since the Mine Safety and Health Administration's "Health Standards for Occupational Noise

Exposure" (30 CFR Part 62) became effective. This noise rule continues to challenge the mining industry, no matter what role you have – as an operator, a miner, a researcher, an academic, an attorney, manufacturer or after-market vendor, or a regulator.

The intentions of the MSHA noise rule are quite simple:

- We issued a uniform rule for coal and metal/nonmetal mining industries so that all miners, regardless of the commodity in which they were working, are protected from occupational noise;
- We offered a performance-based standard, instead of a specification standard, so that operators could install and implement controls to fit their needs and comply with the provisions of the regulations;
- We designed a technology-forcing rule, recognizing that engineering out noise at the source was the ultimate solution and that these solutions offered greater protections for the miner;
- We modified the traditional hierarchy of controls and recognized the primacy of engineering and administrative controls;
- We recognized that the old coal policy of giving credit for hearing protection in lieu of engineering controls hindered the development of noise control technology;

- We acknowledged the importance of hearing protectors in hearing loss prevention and mandated their use for miners who are enrolled in a hearing conservation program;
- We required occupational monitoring to determine compliance and medical surveillance through audiometric testing to determine and track trends in a miner's hearing loss;
- We recognized that engineering and administrative controls could be technologically achievable but not economically feasible; and lastly,
- We promulgated an occupational noise standard that established permissible exposure, action and dual hearing protection levels and exchange rates that are higher than those that are currently enforced in the international arena due to technological and economic feasibility considerations for the mining industry.
- **We recognized that "one shoe does not fit all feet" and that the feasibility determination concerning controls must be handled on a "case-by-case" basis.**
- **We recognized that our inspection personnel must be consistent in their interpretation and enforcement of the Noise Rule and related policies and procedures. To achieve this goal, we have relied on the guidance and advice of the One MSHA Noise Committee as well as conducting comprehensive training of our**

inspectors in the application of the respective regulation, policies and procedures. Tomorrow the session is dedicated to enforcement training and will consist of the same training and provide the same resource materials as what was recently given to MSHA personnel.

The U.S. coal mining industry overall has made significant progress in the control of occupational noise 5 years after the implementation of the MSHA noise rule. Instead of solely relying on hearing protection as a noise control, operators have utilized engineering or administrative controls, or a suite of controls, to minimize miners' occupational noise exposures and to achieve compliance. Tangible and intangible benefits include reduced workers' compensation costs, better running equipment, improved working conditions and productivity, and satisfied employees who do not suffer from hearing loss.

We are all aware that noise "opportunities" (or some may call them challenges) remain in the coal mining industry. Sixty-three percent of citations for occupational noise overexposures in the underground coal mining environment are attributed to the continuous miner, 16% for the roof bolter, 15% for the longwall and 6% for other.

On the surface, the sources for occupational noise overexposures are more diverse: 24% auger mining machine, 11% bulldozer, 9% dragline/shovel, 7% loader and "other" captures 49% of active citations. These noise sources are the most difficult and vexing problems for the entire coal mining industry.

So where do we go from here?

Today, we have the forum not only to learn about practical approaches and solutions, but to challenge our own perceptions about noise in the mining industry.

Today, the U.S. coal mining industry benefits from the leadership of the Coal Noise Partnership, a coalition of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, National Mining Association, Bituminous Coal Operators Association, United Mine Workers of America and MSHA. This partnership creates a unique, collaborative relationship where focused research efforts and limited resources can be leveraged to identify and develop new noise control technology and solutions in an effective manner.

Today, tools such as the internet, DVDs, and other devices can assist in the dissemination of hearing loss prevention information to miners, operators, and the mining community. NIOSH's hearing loss simulator and MSHA's noise control guides are

examples of valuable resources. We need to canvass the mining industry to see what other tools may be helpful in hearing loss prevention.

Today, we can actively listen to those who made a difference in the noise field. We can generate ideas and gain knowledge from those who lead by example and are willing to share their know-how and perspective. We can challenge ourselves to create, innovate, and design solutions.

Today, we are the catalysts – catalysts in creating dialogue in the mining community, actively pursuing solutions and encouraging advancements in noise control technology. We need to be the drivers that take us to the next level of achievement and noise control.

Today, we bring together the entire mining community to conduct a diagnostic on the problems and the barriers for operators, miners and manufacturers in controlling noise at the source.

Today, we challenge the mining industry to stop enabling behaviors in their organizations, i.e. when it comes to noise, “there’s nothing we can do” or “it’s not feasible” or “I’ve worked in a noisy environment all my life…” We strive to instill a new culture, a culture of prevention.

Today, we empower those in our organizations, including our junkyard mechanics, to help us come up with ideas, design solutions and if there are barriers, to seek remedies.

Today, we champion the miner and dispel the notion that investment in noise controls is detrimental to the operator's bottom-line.

Today, we encourage our colleagues to work with NIOSH and MSHA in the research and development of promising noise controls and implementation of technologically achievable engineering controls. We dispel fears that other operators may look upon their efforts with disfavor and if the technology is proven successful, other operators would be forced to implement the control(s). If you buy into this argument, then your priorities are misplaced.

Today, the U.S. coal mining industry benefits from a favorable, domestic energy policy and public appetite for energy and fossil fuels. This has resulted in an increase in the number of surface and underground coal mines and expansions, rising coal prices, increased revenues for publicly-traded coal companies, and the hiring of the next generation of miners. Now is the time to institute a buy-quiet equipment policy and to make those capital

investments for quieter equipment and noise controls to prevent future hearing loss.

So today, if we do not push the envelope in quieting our mining equipment, creating the next generation of quieter mining equipment, and protecting the hearing of our new and current miners, who will?

WE WILL, TODAY!!

THANK YOU.