

**Remarks of David G. Dye,
Acting Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health
Contractor Summit
Tuesday, June 21, 2005
Beckley, WV**

Good morning. Thanks, Ray, for your kind introduction, and thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. This is a very important summit for many reasons – not the least of which is that over the last 20 years (from 1984-2004), contractor hours worked in mining operations have increased 193 percent, while operator hours have decreased 31 percent. We can't have a meaningful discussion about safety and health in the mining industry without including contractors in the equation. That's why we've invited you here today.

MSHA and the mining industry, working together, have achieved great things. Fatalities have been at historic low levels for the past four years. But in spite of those record lows in fatal injuries in the mining industry, we at MSHA have noticed some worrisome trends in those fatalities. In Calendar Year 2004, the contractor fatality rate of .0305 was nearly twice that of the operator fatality rate of .0164. Although contractors represented 14 percent of the hours worked in CY-2004, they represented 24 percent of the fatalities in the mining industry. We can all agree that is a disproportionate amount and it is an issue we must all address.

As you know, it is MSHA's mission to protect and promote the safety and health of America's miners. Contractors are a critically important segment of the mining workforce, and we must do better at protecting and promoting contractors' safety and health in the mines. Our ultimate goal – and yours too, I know -- is to reduce to zero the number of injuries, illnesses and fatalities in our nation's mines.

How will we accomplish our shared goal? The historic lows in fatalities are the positive results of the hard work of MSHA and the mining industry to take care of many of the obvious physical hazards – the ones that could be fixed with better engineering, better equipment, and better technology. But it's clear that we must do more. Miners are still getting hurt, are still dying on the job. We need to take that next step – addressing the human aspect of safety.

We can all agree that we all want everyone to make the right safety decisions. In fact, the question of how to create a culture of safety and health in the mining industry that motivates everyone to make the right safety decisions is taking on greater and greater importance as we look at the root causes of accidents and fatalities in the mines today.

The vast majority of accidents and injuries occurring in the mining industry of today involve human factors – human decisions and choices – as the root cause. We must start looking at the hard work of changing attitudes and behaviors about safety and health. In order to get to the next level – to make it down that final slope toward zero – we must address the difficult questions of what motivates people's decisions and choices about safety and health in the workplace.

Looking at the root causes of accidents is about learning why people make the decisions they make, so that we can use that information to help others make the right decisions. It is not about placing blame, but rather about understanding motivators for safety decisions.

This summer, MSHA is planning an enhanced summer safety and health initiative called “Make the Right Decision,” which will focus on helping mine operators and miners observe and understand safety cultures and choices that lead to the prevention of accidental injuries and fatalities. This initiative will help motivate miners and managers to make the right decisions and choose the safe way rather than the short way.

You will hear more about this initiative as the summer progresses. We will hold workshops at locations around the country. We will be holding a webcast to discuss the human factors in safety decisions in the mining workplace. We will be giving miners and managers the tools they need to make the right safety and health decisions, to conduct risk assessments before they begin tasks, to look at the safety and health cultures in their organizations and work together to make them truly safe and healthy cultures.

Last October, we launched our first safety initiative that addressed human factors in mine safety – the SLAM program that we instituted in our Metal/Nonmetal Safety and Health Division. As many of you know, SLAM stands for Stop – Look – Analyze – Manage, and is a risk assessment program that miners use to assess and control or eliminate hazards before they begin a task.

SLAM promotes improved safety and health and aims to accelerate a culture of prevention in the workplace, looking at potential accidents before they happen, and actively moving to correct or control the situation. And SLAM is designed to get every miner actively engaged in the process. We have provided tools such as discussion packages, training programs, posters and other materials to reach out to the industry.

SLAM has been very well received throughout the metal/nonmetal mining industry. Because of its success, we will be combining SLAM this summer with another tool to address human factors in safety – the SMART program, which addresses management’s role in establishing and maintaining a workplace culture that values safety over shortcuts. SMART stands for Stop – Measure – Act – Review – Train. The combined program will be called SLAM Risks the SMART Way, and will be rolled out in both Coal and Metal/Nonmetal. It will be presented at the workshops we will have around the country, and we will make available discussion packages, training aids, posters, stickers and other materials. SLAM and SMART can still be used separately for mining operations where size or other factors make one or the other plan impractical.

While we are increasing MSHA’s focus on safety and health decisions over the summer, I want to assure you that this is not a limited-time initiative. Understanding safety and health decisions, understanding the root causes of safety and health behaviors and choices in the mining workplace, understanding why people choose to take the actions they do is critical to us in helping the mining industry build safety and health cultures that reward good safety and health

decisions and make the expectation of making the right decision a part of every workplace routine.

We want your help to make this a success. We are asking each and every one of you to Make the Right Decision and to empower your employees to Make the Right Decision. Choose the safe way, not the short way. Establishing and maintaining a safe and healthful mining workplace is an effort that begins with you. Make the Right Decision – Decide to Work Safely and Stay Healthy.

Thank you for your time this morning – I'll be happy to take questions now.