



News Release

U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Public Affairs
Atlanta, Ga.
Release Number 06-1527-ATL

For Immediate Release
Date: August 29, 2006
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First MSHA-Approved Proximity Detection System is Put through Its Paces

CLAY, Ky. – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and mine industry stakeholders today demonstrated the first agency-approved proximity detection system for remote control continuous mining machines. The demonstration of the TramGuard™ system took place at the Clay, Ky., headquarters of Gamma Services International (GSI), a safety and production assistance company.

Continuous mining machines are mobile units consisting of a cylindrical cutting head that constantly extracts coal from the seam and loads it onto conveyors. Remote-controlled continuous miners are used to work in a variety of difficult seams and conditions.

Proximity detection systems provide automatic proximity detection and machine shutdown to guard against mine personnel being run over, crushed or pinned when they are positioned in a hazardous area close to the continuous mining machine. The partnership between MSHA, Geosteering Mining Services, and Consol Energy was formed in an effort to address accidents associated with the use of remote control continuous miners. Since 1984, there have been 29 fatalities related to the use of these machines.

“These systems can be a significant tool to reduce fatalities and serious injuries at mining operations,” said David G. Dye, MSHA’s acting administrator. “They provide consistent warning and shutdown commands and effectively keep continuous miner operators from entering the hazardous area around the machine.”

The TramGuard™ system consists of a personal alarm device worn by the continuous miner operator or others needing protection. The system elicits both audible and visible warnings to prevent contact with the turning radius of the continuous miner. Machine-mounted components include field generators housed in explosion-proof enclosures with a warning LED included; an alpha-numeric display enclosure that indicates system status, and LED lights that indicate warning status. If the continuous mining machine is closer to a miner than a specified distance, the system will shut down the tram motors and hydraulic booms.

The TramGuard™ system is based on technology initially developed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In November 2004, MSHA met with Geosteering, GSI and NIOSH representatives to form a partnership and test prototype equipment. The proximity detection system received MSHA approval in January 2006, and a successful field trial took place at Consol of Kentucky Inc.’s Jones Fork E-3 Mine one month later.

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