

News Release



U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Public Affairs
Philadelphia, Pa.
Release Number: 07-446-PHI

For Immediate Release
March 23, 2007
Contact: Dirk Fillpot Amy Louviere
Phone: (202) 693-9406 (202) 693-9423

U.S. Labor Department's MSHA issues report on Pennsylvania mining fatality *October 2006 explosion at anthracite mine left one miner dead*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) today released its accident investigation report regarding the Oct. 23, 2006, underground mine explosion at R&D Coal Co. Inc., which resulted in a fatality. Dale Reightler, 43, was killed in a methane blast initiated during an explosives detonation at the underground anthracite coal mine in Schuylkill County, Pa. The report determined that non-compliance with approved ventilation and roof control plans, poor blasting practices and improper pre-shift examinations directly contributed to the fatality. It also marks this mining accident as the first to have violations issued and assessed under MSHA's new flagrant violation procedures.

"Mine operators have an obligation to maintain the highest safety and health standards for their employees, and that means complying with the regulations and requirements put forth by the Mine Act," said Richard E. Stickler, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "R&D Coal Co. Inc. failed to observe basic mine safety practices and violated critical safety standards. As a result, a miner tragically lost his life."

Seven miners were underground at the time of the accident. Reightler, a six-year veteran of R&D, began loading blasting powder into each of six holes that had been drilled into the coal face. The rest of the explosives were stored in an uncovered box located about 30 feet from the site of the planned detonation. With the help of another miner, Reightler installed a 42-inch timber prop near the face and disconnected the air hose from the pneumatic equipment in order to increase the section's ventilation. After the prop was installed, Reightler completed wiring the shot. He gave the signal, and approximately one minute later the shot was fired. While the first two blasts went off normally, the third created such force as to sever a water line to the face and cause excessive smoke to rapidly fill the area. Reightler's body was discovered almost immediately 800 feet from the site of the initial blast.

MSHA was notified more than an hour after the accident, and agency officials arrived on the scene almost immediately thereafter. The federal investigation, which began the following day, determined that a number of actions directly contributed to the fatal accident:

- Miners conducting blasting activities were not qualified to handle, load or fire explosives.
- A proper pre-shift examination designed to identify potential hazards was not adequately conducted.
- Miners who loaded boreholes with explosives did not stem them in accordance with federal regulations.
- The mine operator failed to follow provisions of the approved ventilation and roof control plans.
- Explosives were fired before miners could move to a safe area.
- The mine operator failed to assure a ventilated environment devoid of explosive gases.

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