

News Release



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Contact: Amy Louviere Matt Faraci
Phone: 202-693-9423 202-693-9406

MSHA approves first wireless tracking system *New technology represents significant progress under MINER Act*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) announced it has issued its first official approval of a wireless tracking system for use in underground mines. The approval was issued by MSHA’s Approval and Certification Center to Venture Design Services Inc. for the MineTracer Miner Location Monitoring System.

“Since the Sago Mine disaster, MSHA has received dozens of proposals from manufacturers and distributors of emergency communication and tracking systems,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “This approved system provides a wireless means for mine operators to track miners underground both before and after an emergency event.”

The system components normally will be interconnected with low-voltage DC power cables; however, in the event of an emergency, the power cables become de-energized, and the system will resort to battery power and can remain operational wirelessly. Although not yet incorporated in the design, Venture Design intends to add text messaging and gas detection to the system in the future.

Since 2006, MSHA has issued 36 new or revised approvals for communications and tracking systems, including a hand-held portable radio, several leaky feeder systems and several radio frequency identification (RFID) tracking system components. MSHA currently is examining 41 additional communications and tracking approval applications, including several wireless communications and tracking systems.

The Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response (MINER) Act of 2006 requires that each mine evacuation plan include provisions for tracking the pre-accident location of all underground miners. Furthermore, the MINER Act requires that mine operators adopt wireless communications and electronic tracking systems by June 2009.

MSHA’s Approval and Certification Center tests a wide range of mining equipment, components, instruments and materials to ensure that they meet government standards for safe design and construction. This work helps to ensure that the various products will not contribute to an explosion, fire, electrical failure, vehicle crash or other kind of accident. The center, located near Wheeling, W.Va., houses laboratories, explosion galleries and offices that perform administrative work and recordkeeping.

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