

# News Release



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## **MSHA kicks off safety initiative to focus on roof fall fatalities** *PROP program calls attention to hazards that lead to roof falls*

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) launched its annual Preventive Roof/Rib Outreach Program (PROP) today to highlight the potential hazards of roof falls and coal outbursts. More roof falls occur during the summer months than any other time of year, according to MSHA statistics.

“Since 1997, 29 coal miners died as a result of roof falls and coal outbursts,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “Miners and mine operators are urged to always conduct thorough and frequent checks of the mine roof, and never work or walk under unsupported roof.”

From June 23 until September 30, MSHA inspectors will speak directly to miners and mine operators about the dangers of roof falls and rib rolls, and distribute informational material providing safety guidelines for roof and rib control, mobile roof supports and retreat mining.

In the wake of a massive coal bounce that claimed six lives at Utah’s Crandall Canyon Mine last August and three additional lives in the subsequent recovery effort, MSHA has taken additional steps aimed at improving safety at deep cover mines: The agency developed a revised roof control plan approval process that includes a comprehensive, detailed checklist to document the steps of plan submission and review; has asked mine operators to justify and provide detailed information for atypical roof control plans; and established a process to involve MSHA’s Office of Technical Support in the review of atypical plans.

In addition, MSHA inspection personnel will visit all retreat mining sections more frequently to evaluate the effectiveness of and miners’ familiarity with roof control plans. The agency has issued guidelines on the proper use of the Analysis of Retreat Mining Pillar Stability computer program, the most widely used program by ground control specialists to model and analyze pillar design during retreat mining operations. A list of best practices addressing ground control for deep cover coal mines has been posted on MSHA’s Web site.

Historically, more roof fall accidents have occurred during the hot, humid summer months as warm air carries moisture into mines. The moisture is absorbed into the roof strata and may weaken the roof, making it easier for the mine roof to fall. Many of these accidents occurred in intersections, and research has shown that intersections are eight to 10 times more likely to collapse than an equivalent length of entry or crosscut.

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