

News Release



U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
Release Number: 09-17-NAT

For Immediate Release
Jan. 8, 2009
Contact: Amy Louviere
Phone: 202-693-9423

Mine deaths fell to all-time low in 2008

ARLINGTON, Va. – Preliminary data from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) released today show that mine fatalities in 2008 fell to an all-time low recording a 31 percent drop from 2007. Metal/nonmetal mines recorded the lowest level of fatalities in that sector of mining since statistics were first recorded in 1910, and the fatality level in coal mines was the lowest recorded number since 2005.

“Although these numbers demonstrate continuing improvements at our nation’s mines, they also represent significant loss to the families and friends of 51 miners,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “We must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to bring all miners home safe and healthy at the end of every shift.”

Stickler pointed to a number of milestones the agency reached in 2008, including the first-ever completion of all mandated safety and health inspections, the first-ever issuance of a pattern of violation notice, the implementation of eight final rules, and the successful collection of delinquent penalties from several scofflaw mine operators.

Of the 51 fatalities reported, 28 of the victims were at surface operations, while 23 miners died in underground mining accidents. Fifteen workers died in accidents involving powered haulage – 10 in coal mines and five in metal/nonmetal mines – which was the leading cause of fatal mining accidents in the U.S. during 2008.

In 2008, MSHA assessed 198,700 civil penalties for violations of mine safety and health legal requirements, compared with 130,100 in 2007. The dollar amount of assessed penalties more than doubled in that time frame, from \$74.5 million in 2007 to \$194 million in 2008. The number and dollar amounts of civil penalties in 2008 are the most ever assessed in a single year.

Seventy-four flagrant violations were assessed in 2008, compared with 15 in 2007. They were assessed at a total for each year of \$11,474,400 and \$2,588,200, respectively.

A detailed summary of MSHA’s enforcement and assessment activities, along with the mining industry’s safety and health performance between fiscal year 2000 and 2008, is available at www.msha.gov. MSHA gathers mining fatality data from the 50 states, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. To view these statistics, go to www.msha.gov. Under the “statistics” heading, click on “fatality charts.”

###

U.S. Department of Labor releases are accessible on the Internet at www.dol.gov. The information in this news release will be made available in alternate format (large print, Braille, audio tape or disc) from the COAST office upon request. Please specify which news release when placing your request at 202-693-7828 or TTY 202-693-7755. The Labor Department is committed to providing America’s employers and employees with easy access to understandable information on how to comply with its laws and regulations. For more information, please visit www.dol.gov/compliance.