

News Release



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US Labor Department's MSHA kicks off annual 'Winter Alert' campaign *Mine operators urged to follow safety checklists during colder months*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) today kicked off the 2009 Winter Alert campaign to warn miners and mine operators of the dangers colder weather can bring to the mining environment. Statistics show that most coal mine explosions throughout history have occurred during the period between October and March. This year's slogan, "Beat Winter Hazards, Win with Winter Alert" appears on posters and hardhat stickers with a race car theme.

"Conditions at underground and surface coal mines can change dramatically during the winter months," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "We must be ever mindful of the seasonal changes that can affect our work environments."

Low barometric pressures and low humidity, coupled with seasonal drying of many areas in underground coal mines, have contributed to the larger number of mine explosions during winter months. Other hazards include limited visibility, icy haulage roads and walkways, and the freezing and thawing effect on highwalls at surface mines.

MSHA warns miners and operators at underground coal mines to follow safety checklists by ensuring adequate ventilation, applying liberal amounts of rock dust, conducting frequent and thorough examinations, and being familiar with emergency procedures to prevent coal mine ignitions and explosions.

Miners also are urged to be vigilant about keeping escapeways clear of impediments. Miners and operators of surface mines should examine the stability of highwalls, remove snow and ice from walkways, de-ice any equipment, and apply salt and sand liberally where needed.

During their normal inspection duties, MSHA inspectors will distribute posters, hardhat stickers, a "practice ventilation awareness" pocket card and a "basic ventilation" compact disc PowerPoint presentation that can be shown and discussed during meetings with underground coal miners.

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