

# News Release



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## **MSHA marks 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of landmark mine legislation** *Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 paved way for major reforms*

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) today commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 (Mine Act), which instituted the strongest and most comprehensive occupational safety and health protections that had ever been enacted in the country.

The Mine Act was born out of a mining disaster that occurred in November 1968, when 78 miners died in an explosion at Consolidation Coal’s No. 9 mine in Farmington, W.Va. Members of the mining community, angered by the continuing toll being taken on the lives of miners, rallied together and called for sweeping changes. Widows of some of the fallen miners even travelled to Washington to testify before Congress.

“The Farmington disaster changed the course of history and transformed mine safety and health in this country,” said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. “In the end, those who perished led the way to legal reforms that spared the lives of the thousands of miners who would follow.”

“Like many others working in the mining industry 40 years ago, I remember the significant changes that passage of the Mine Act would make possible in the coming years,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “Over time, we have witnessed considerable improvements in mine safety and health, as well as in the lives of miners and their families – all brought about by this landmark legislation.”

The Mine Act increased enforcement powers at mines, mandated four complete inspections of underground coal mines and two complete inspections of surface mines annually, and established mandatory fines for all violations and criminal penalties for certain violations. It also established safety standards aimed at curbing mine accidents such as roof falls, mine fires and explosions, as well as haulage, electrical and other accidents. It designated limits on unhealthy coal mine dust and, for the first time, provided government benefits for miners disabled by black lung disease.

MSHA plans to further commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in March 2010, when the new legislation went into effect.

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