



# News Release

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## **MSHA urges outdoor enthusiasts to steer clear of mines and quarries**

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration marked the upcoming weekend’s unofficial start of summer with its annual warning to outdoor enthusiasts who may stray – knowingly or otherwise – onto mine property. Each year, numerous children and adults are injured or killed while engaging in recreational pursuits at active and abandoned mine sites around the country.

In 1999, MSHA launched “Stay Out–Stay Alive,” a public safety campaign, to educate people unfamiliar with mining about the hazards that exist at sand and gravel pits, underground mines and water-filled quarries.

“As schools begin letting out for the summer, there are more opportunities to explore the great outdoors,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “We want our kids to stay safe and be aware that mines are not playgrounds.”

Thomas Jones, a star running back with the Kansas City Chiefs, joined forces as SOSA’s spokesman last year, and since then has delivered his safety message to school-age children, met with members of Congress to encourage their involvement, and taped several audio and video public service announcements. Jones, whose parents were coal miners in southwestern Virginia, admits to the lure of mine exploration during his early years.

“When you’re a kid, you’re adventurous and want to check out places like old mines and quarries,” said Jones. “We didn’t realize the dangers, and there were some close calls.”

“Thomas Jones is the ideal spokesman for the SOSA campaign,” said Main. “As a professional football player, he is a role model for children and can deliver the kind of message they will listen to.”

Abandoned underground mines may harbor hidden openings that drop hundreds of feet down. Rotting timbers and unstable rock formations make cave-ins a real danger. Lethal concentrations of deadly gases can accumulate in underground passages, and total darkness and debris add to the hazards.

Water-filled quarries, which claim the most lives through drownings, have slippery slopes and unstable rock ledges. The water, which looks inviting, may conceal old machinery and sharp objects left behind after a mining operation closes. Even expert swimmers have encountered trouble in the dangerously cold and deceptively deep waters – and they can’t rely on lifeguards to rescue them.

Old surface mines, such as sand and gravel pits, are popular with ATV enthusiasts. However, they often contain hills of loose materials in stockpiles or refuse heaps that can easily collapse and cause deadly rollovers.

For further information about “Stay Out-Stay Alive,” visit <http://www.msha.gov/SOSA/SOSAhome.asp>.

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