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## **US Labor Department's MSHA to propose rule on proximity detection systems** *Technology would help prevent crushing, pinning, striking accidents of miners*

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration will publish on Aug. 31 a proposed rule requiring that continuous mining machines used in underground coal mines be equipped with proximity detection systems. Proximity detection refers to a technology that can be installed on mining machinery to detect the presence of personnel or other machinery within a certain distance. These systems can be programmed to send warning signals and stop machine movement when the programmed areas are breached.

Consistent with the principles in the president's Executive Order on Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review, MSHA is proposing a rule instead of issuing a scheduled emergency temporary standard to provide opportunity for public participation prior to implementation. During the comment period, which will close on Nov. 14, MSHA will hold public hearings in Denver, Colo., on Oct. 18; Charleston, W.Va., on Oct. 20; and Washington, Pa., on Oct. 25.

The proposed rule would strengthen the protection of miners working near continuous mining machines by reducing the potential for crushing, pinning and striking hazards. From 1984 through 2010, 30 miners died and 220 were injured when they became crushed, pinned or struck by these machines. Two such fatalities occurred in 2010 and one, to date, in 2011. These fatalities and injuries could have been prevented by use of a proximity detection system.

In February 2010, MSHA published a request for information asking for input from the mining community to determine the technological and economic feasibility, training needs and benefits of any suggested regulatory action.

"In response to the RFI, MSHA received stakeholder input to advance the rulemaking process," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "We know that the technology exists for proximity detection, some underground coal mine operators already are using it, and we know that it saves lives."

According to the proposed rule, underground coal mine operators would be required to equip existing continuous mining machines with a proximity detection system within 18 months from the publication date of a final rule to allow operators time to have equipment retrofitted and to train miners and supervisors in the new technology. Newly manufactured continuous mining machines would be required to be equipped within three months of the publication date of a final rule. Full-face continuous mining machines, which include integral roof bolting equipment, develop an entry with a single cut and involve less machine movement, would not be included under the proposed rule.

Additionally, proximity detection systems would be required to cause a continuous mining machine to stop at least 3 feet away from a miner unless the machine is remotely cutting coal or rock, in which case it must stop before contacting a miner; provide an audible or visual warning signal when the machine is 5 feet or closer to a miner, except while a continuous mining machine is cutting coal or rock; provide a visual signal on the machine that indicates the system is functioning properly; prevent movement of the machine if the system is not functioning properly; prevent interference with or from other electrical systems; and be installed and maintained by a trained person.

Mines in South Africa already use proximity detection systems on continuous mining machines. To date, MSHA has approved three systems for use in the U.S., which have been installed on at least 35 continuous mining machines. For further information, visit the proximity detection single source page at <http://www.msha.gov> under Special Initiatives.

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