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MSHA announces results of March impact inspections

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that federal inspectors issued 249 violations during special impact inspections conducted at nine coal mines and two metal/nonmetal mines last month. The coal mines were issued 187 citations, 25 orders and two safeguards, while the metal/nonmetal operations were issued 35 citations.

These inspections, which began in force in April 2010 following the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine, involve mines that merit increased agency attention and enforcement due to their poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns, including high numbers of violations or closure orders; frequent hazard complaints or hotline calls; plan compliance issues; inadequate workplace examinations; a high number of accidents, injuries or illnesses; fatalities; and adverse conditions such as increased methane liberation, faulty roof conditions and inadequate ventilation.

As an example of the most recent impact inspections, beginning on the evening shift March 13 and continuing past midnight into March 14, MSHA visited Redhawk Mining LLC, Redhawk # 1 Mine in Floyd County, Ky. Federal inspectors secured mine communications upon arrival to prevent advance notification underground. The enforcement team examined four conveyer belt lines on four mechanized mining units, or MMUs.

This mine has a history of liberating methane and had been put on notice by MSHA that greater efforts to comply with the approved ventilation plan were needed. Inspectors found that required air quantities in idle and active coal faces, as approved in the mine’s ventilation plan, were not being maintained, and the type and number of water sprays for respirable dust control were not in compliance. For example, the operator failed to use a line curtain, nine of the 27 water sprays were the wrong type, one spray was plugged and six others were improperly oriented. Properly maintained and operating dust controls are critical in preventing miners from contracting diseases associated with the inhalation of respirable coal mine dust such as pneumoconiosis, silicosis, bronchitis and emphysema.

Inspectors found that mine examiners failed to conduct adequate on-shift examinations during the production shift. Many obvious and extensive hazards were identified on the active MMUs, including accumulations of combustible material in the form of loose coal and coal dust, not maintaining the approved dust control parameters and not complying with the approved ventilation plan. The mine was shut down for 72 hours.

These deficiencies appear to have existed for an extended period. All mine examiners subsequently were trained on proper examinations and monitored by MSHA personnel, and the entire workforce was trained on the new ventilation plan. Approved ventilation plans are designed to control methane liberation, protect miners from black lung and prevent the risk of frictional methane face ignitions.

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US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR NEWS RELEASE – PAGE 2

“The closure order is still one of the most effective tools inspectors have to bring about compliance, even during impact inspections,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “We will not hesitate to use these and other enforcement tools to protect the nation’s miners.”

As a second example from last month’s impact inspections, also on March 13, MSHA arrived during the second shift at Perry County Coal Corp.’s E3-1 Mine in Perry County, Ky. The mine was on a 5-day spot inspection for methane liberation in excess of 1 million cubic feet per 24 hours. Inspectors traveled to one of its two portals and secured the guard shack and mine office while another inspector traveled to the second portal and secured the communication system there. The rest of the inspection party traveled underground in two different directions along belt conveyors to each of two producing MMUs.

MSHA issued the operator 38 citations and 16 unwarrantable failure orders, including for accumulations of combustible materials 14 times during the inspection. Accumulations of combustible materials were extensive in all mine areas where inspectors traveled and included both MMUs, multiple belt conveyors, escapeways, track entries, a return aircourse and equipment. At one MMU, accumulations of combustible materials in the form of loose coal, coal dust and float coal dust were black in color, dry to the touch and ranged in depth from paper thin to 3 feet from the section loading point to the face area (360 feet), as well as on the mine floor and ribs in all areas of the section. No effort had been made to control the dust, apply rock dust or remove the accumulations. It was evident that combustible materials had been allowed to accumulate for several shifts.

The accumulation of combustible materials, if left unchecked, and in concert with other conditions such as high methane liberation, could potentially cause a mine fire or explosion. The operator did not comply with a wide range of standards and demonstrated overall noncompliance with mine safety and health regulations intended to protect miners and provide for safe and healthful working conditions.

Additional citations and orders were issued for failure to comply with the roof control plan, as well as to maintain belt rollers and conveyor belts, firefighting equipment and deluge water sprays, and permissible electric face equipment. The operator also was cited regarding inadequate examinations for hazards that clearly had existed for some time with no effort taken to correct them.

Since April 2010, MSHA has conducted 431 impact inspections at coal and metal/nonmetal mines. These inspections have resulted in 7,642 citations, 757 orders and 28 safeguards for a total of 8,427 issuances.

Editor’s note: A spreadsheet containing the results of impact inspections in March 2012 accompanies this news release.

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MSHA Monthly Impact Inspection List

(March 2012)

March 2012

Coal

Mine Information						Type of Issuance				S&S Information				Issuances - Type of Action								Justifications																		
District	State	Mine ID	Controller Name	Operator Name	Mine Name	Cit	Orders	Safe -guards (Coal only)	Total	S&S	Non-S&S	Total	S&S Rate	104(a)	104(b)	104(d)(1) Citation	104(d)(1) Order	104(d)(2)	104(e)(2)	314(b)	103(k)	104(g)(1)	103(j)	107(a)	Total	1. Operator Tactics	2. Hazard Complaints /Hotline Calls	3. Plan Compliance Issues	4. Inadequate Exams	5. Accidents, Injuries, Illnesses	6. Fatal Accidents	7. Enforcement History	8. Adverse Conditions							
District 02	PA	3609549	Citicorp Venture Capital Ltd	RoxCoal, Inc.	Kimberly Run	9	0	0	9	1	8	9	11.11%	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9														
District 03	WV	4608864	Alliance Resource Partners LP	Tunnel Ridge, LLC	Tunnel Ridge Mine	22	2	0	24	10	14	24	41.67%	22	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	1													
District 04	WV	4609172	John B Preece	West Virginia Mine Power, Inc.	Mountaineer Pocahontas Mine No 1	14	0	1	15	3	12	15	20.00%	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15														
District 05	VA	4407224	Arch Coal Inc	Cumberland River Coal Co Inc	Pine Branch 1	21	0	1	22	6	15	21	28.57%	21	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	22			1												
District 06	KY	1519242	Thomas A Potter; John M Potter	Redhawk Mining, LLC	Redhawk #1	39	1	0	40	10	30	40	25.00%	38	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40			1	1											
District 06	KY	1517917	Jimmie Leon Hess	Brem Coal Co LLC	No 2	12	3	0	15	6	8	14	42.86%	12	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	15	1	1													
District 07	KY	1518662	TECO Energy Inc	Perry County Coal Corporation	E3-1	38	16	0	54	39	15	54	72.22%	38	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54			1	1											
District 09	CO	0504674	Oxbow Carbon & Minerals Inc	Oxbow Mining LLC	Elk Creek	12	0	0	12	2	10	12	16.67%	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12															
District 12	WV	4608570	Richard H Abraham	Rio Group, Inc.	Coalburg No. 2 Mine	20	3	0	23	7	16	23	30.43%	19	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23															
9						National Totals				187	25	2	214	84	128	212	39.62%	186	0	2	22	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	214	2	1	3	2	1	0	7	2

March 2012

Metal/Nonmetal

Mine Information						Type of Issuance				S&S Information				Issuances - Type of Action								Justifications																
District	State	Mine ID	Controller Name	Operator Name	Mine Name	Cit	Orders	Safe -guards (Coal only)	Total	S&S	Non-S&S	Total	S&S Rate	104(a)	104(b)	104(d)(1) Citation	104(d)(1) Order	104(d)(2)	104(e)(2)	314(b)	103(k)	104(g)(1)	103(j)	107(a)	Total	1. Operator Tactics	2. Hazard Complaints /Hotline Calls	3. Plan Compliance Issues	4. Inadequate Exams	5. Accidents, Injuries, Illnesses	6. Fatal Accidents	7. Enforcement History	8. Adverse Conditions					
SC	LA	1600358	Apollo Management LP & IMC Global Incorporated	North American Salt Company	Cote Blanche Mine	13	0	0	13	6	7	13	46.15%	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13													
WE	CA	0402542	Molycorp Inc	Molycorp Minerals	Mt Pass Mine & Mill	22	0	0	22	4	18	22	18.18%	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22		1		1	1								
2						National Totals				35	0	0	35	10	25	35	28.57%	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1

Total	11	National Totals				222	25	2	249	94	153	247	38.06%	221	0	2	22	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	249	2	2	3	3	3	0	7	3
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