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MSHA releases Upper Big Branch Mine investigation interview transcripts

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today released 25 transcripts of witness interviews from the investigation of the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion that occurred in April 2010. These transcripts, from interviews covering mine rescue and recovery activities immediately following the blast, are now available on MSHA’s website at <http://www.msha.gov>. They represent the first set in a series of interview transcripts that MSHA, with the approval of the U.S. Department of Justice, plans to release over the coming months.

The first team underground consisted of members of Massey’s rescue teams followed by state and MSHA rescue team members. The transcripts released today are from interviews with five employees of Massey Energy who participated in rescue efforts, and 10 mine rescuers each from MSHA and the West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health, Safety and Training.

The transcripts describe how the rescuers were called to the Upper Big Branch Mine following the explosion, as well as their activities underground while searching for the missing miners, establishing communications with the surface and ultimately recovering the 29 victims. While the interviews primarily addressed those hours and days spent in rescue and recovery efforts, some reflect additional information.

“During mine emergencies, individuals who volunteer for these difficult missions place their own lives at risk and make decisions in the time of crisis to help save others,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “As many mine rescue events of the past have indicated, confusion is not uncommon, and information is not always effectively communicated as rescuers search for survivors in a race against time and in a life-threatening atmosphere. This rescue operation was no different. We owe these individuals our gratitude for their willingness to respond to these difficult circumstances and to place themselves at risk for the sake of others.”

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