

From the Assistant Secretary's Desk
2011 Fatality Analysis

MSHA has released preliminary data for 2011 fatality numbers showing that 37 miners died in work-related accidents at the nation's mines in 2011. There were 21 coal mining and 16 metal/nonmetal mining fatalities last year, compared with 48 and 23, respectively, in 2010, making 2011 the year with the second-lowest number of mining deaths since statistics for both coal and metal/nonmetal were first recorded in 1910.

Of the 37 fatalities reported, 12 occurred at surface coal mines, 11 at surface metal/nonmetal mines, nine at underground coal mines and five at underground metal/nonmetal mines. Nine workers died in accidents involving machinery — six in coal mines and three in metal/nonmetal mines — making it the leading cause of fatal mining accidents.

Kentucky had the most mining deaths — eight — in 2011, followed by West Virginia with six and Ohio with three. All but one of those deaths occurred in coal mines. Several of the larger coal-producing states, including Alabama, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Utah, experienced zero mine fatalities last year.

Mining deaths are preventable. The year that the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 passed, 273 miners died and since that time, fatality numbers have steadily declined. In order to prevent mine deaths, operators must have in place effective safety and health management programs that are constantly evaluated, find-and-fix programs to identify and eliminate mine hazards, and training for all mining personnel.

MSHA has undertaken a number of measures to prevent mining deaths: increased surveillance and strategic enforcement through impact inspections at mines with troubling compliance histories; enhanced pattern of violations actions; special initiatives such as "Rules to Live By," which focuses attention on the most common causes of mining deaths; and outreach efforts such as "Safety Pro in a Box," which provides guidance to the metal/nonmetal mining industry on best practices and compliance responsibilities.

It takes the entire mining community to continue to reach new milestones in health and safety. While fewer miners are dying on the job, we can never alter our focus because, as we know, things can change in a moment. Miners need the reassurance that they will return home safe and healthy after each shift.

To see data on mining fatalities by state in 2011 and as far back as 2001, visit <http://www.msha.gov/stats/charts/Allstates.pdf>.