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PROGRAM POLICY LETTER NO. P10-V-6

FROM: KEVIN G. STRICKLIN  
Administrator for  
Coal Mine Safety and Health

SUBJECT: Bleeder System Examinations

**Scope**

This Program Policy Letter (PPL) applies to underground coal mine operators, miners' representatives, independent contractors, and Coal Mine Safety and Health (CMS&H) enforcement personnel.

**Purpose**

This PPL addresses bleeder system examinations in accordance with both the weekly examination requirements under 30 C.F.R. § 75.364(a)(2) and the preshift examination requirements under 30 C.F.R. § 75.360.

**Policy**

The weekly examination under 30 C.F.R. § 75.364(a)(2) requires that at least every 7 days, a certified person shall evaluate the effectiveness of bleeder systems required by § 75.334. Title 30 C.F.R. § 75.334 requires that the approved ventilation plan specify the design and use of bleeder systems; the means to determine the effectiveness of bleeder systems; the means for adequately maintaining bleeder entries free of obstructions such as roof falls and standing water; and the location of ventilating devices such as regulators, stoppings and bleeder connectors used to control air movement through the worked-out area.

Recent accidents, near misses and enforcement history relating to bleeder systems show that additional resources need to be devoted to the inspection and evaluation of worked-out areas. District Managers and personnel in the plan review and inspection process should pay special attention to the ventilation plan contents relating to roof support, removal of standing water, location of ventilation controls, and maintaining adequate ventilation to assure the air where miners work or travel, including mine examiners conducting required examinations, contains at

least 19.5 percent oxygen and is sufficient to dilute, render harmless and carry away flammable, explosive, noxious, and harmful gases, dust, smoke, and fumes.

One entry of each set of bleeder entries used as part of a bleeder system must be traveled in its entirety each week. Some mine operators employ a "buddy system" when conducting weekly examinations of the bleeder system where two persons travel into the bleeder with the expectation that if one person becomes incapacitated, the other person would be able to provide assistance or obtain help. Unless both persons are certified mine examiners, the practice of sending a noncertified person to accompany the mine examiner is a violation of 30 C.F.R. § 75.360, which prohibits persons other than certified examiners from entering or remaining in an underground area unless a preshift examination has been completed. As a safety practice, mine operators may send two certified persons together to conduct the examinations. However, noncertified persons are not permitted to travel bleeders or any other area of an underground coal mine where a preshift examination has not been completed.

### **Background**

On November 23, 2009, a mine foreman, who was a certified person, was accompanied by another miner, who was not a certified person, during the weekly examination in the bleeder. The two miners encountered a humid and unusually hot atmosphere as they traveled in the bleeder entries. Both miners became incapacitated and the noncertified miner died.

### **Authority**

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, as amended, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. and 30 C.F.R. §§ 75.360 and 75.364(a)(2).

### **Internet Availability**

This information may be viewed on the Internet by accessing MSHA's home page [www.msha.gov](http://www.msha.gov), then choosing "Compliance Info" and "Program Policy Letters."

### **Issuing Offices and Contact Persons**

Coal Mine Safety and Health, Safety Division  
Michael G. Kalich, (202) 693-9714  
E-mail: [kalich.michael@dol.gov](mailto:kalich.michael@dol.gov)

### **Distribution**

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