

Recent MSHA Outreach with Metal/Nonmetal Stakeholders

One of my initiatives when I arrived at MSHA was to get out into the mining community and meet with our stakeholders to share what we are doing at MSHA and discuss how we could improve mine safety and health. We have attended many stakeholder events across the country since then. Working with our stakeholders, we have undertaken numerous initiatives that have improved MSHA enforcement consistency, mine operator compliance and mine safety and health. These efforts have, coupled with other actions, been highly successful. Citations and orders issued by MSHA have decreased about 18 percent from 2010 through 2012. Most importantly, 2011 had the lowest injury and fatal rates in mining history and by all indications 2012 had even lower injury and fatal rates. Work with our metal/nonmetal stakeholders, including national mining and labor organizations, state aggregate associations and others, on issues such as guarding (which was the most commonly cited standard) and fall protection have improved MSHA enforcement consistency and provided the mining industry better guidance, resulting in substantial improvements in compliance. Our efforts to improve MSHA and stakeholder communications at the local level have also paid dividends.

Some of our most recent metal/nonmetal stakeholder meetings took us to the Southeast and the Midwest to meet with state aggregate associations, labor representatives, and miners and managers at four mining and processing sites. We saw first-hand the successful results of the work of MSHA, stakeholders and operators in improving health and safety for our nation's miners.

In Alabama, I, along with Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations Pat Silvey, and Metal/NonMetal Administrator Neal Merrifield, had productive meetings with state aggregate associations from Florida, Georgia, Kentucky and Virginia, who were joined by Portland Cement Association, Mosaic Corporation, and the National Stone Sand and Gravel Association.

While in Alabama, I visited the Leeds Cement Plant to see the facility and meet with the mine management, miners' representatives and employees to hear their success story. Leeds, a more than 100-year old facility operated by Lehigh Hanson, is a 128-employee operation with hourly workers, represented by the United Steelworkers union, which annually produces nearly 1 million tons of Portland cement. In 2009, the plant experienced 16 MSHA-reportable injuries or illnesses - three of which involved lost work-time. Also that year, 146 citations were issued at the plant. Action was clearly needed to address these issues.

Working with the MSHA Metal and Nonmetal District Office in Birmingham, Alabama, the operator, miners representatives and miners implemented a safety program that resulted in a decrease in the number of reportable injuries or illnesses from the 16 cited in 2009 to three in 2012, with no one lost-time accidents. Also, compliance greatly improved with the number of MSHA-issued citations dropping by 85 percent over the 3-year period. I was able to pass on MSHA's appreciation to the employees at Leeds for their improved compliance and accident and injury records.

In Indianapolis, Administrator Merrifield and I met with aggregate association members from Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin similar to those in Alabama. This was our 4th meeting with the Midwestern group. The attendees agreed that face-to-face meetings with MSHA have been very beneficial to all. We were also able to meet with labor representatives while in Indianapolis and discuss mine safety.

In Indiana we visited the Martin Marietta Kentucky Avenue Underground Limestone mine, Hanson Aggregates' Harding Street Quarry and the Martin Marietta Belmont Sand and Gravel dredge facility. While at the Harding Street Quarry we met with the employees and heard about their safety record of no lost time or injuries in 2011, 2012, or the first half of 2013.

These efforts are some of the many in the mining industry that are moving mine safety in the right direction so that miners can go to work, put in their shift and return home to their families safe and healthy at the end of each shift.

To view some of the photos from the Southeastern and Midwestern events, click on the following link.