

From the Assistant Secretary's Desk



While 2010 will be remembered for the explosion that killed 29 men at the Upper Big Branch mine, we must remember that 42 additional miners' lives also ended in tragedy last year. We must honor these miners by increasing our efforts to ensure safe and healthy mining workplaces for our nation's miners.

In 2010, 19 coal miners in addition to the 29 who lost their lives at the Upper Big Branch mine were killed in mining accidents. Twenty-three miners in the metal and nonmetal mining industry also died in mining accidents – 45 percent were contractors. Not including the Upper Big Branch-related deaths, it appears that more than half of the 42 additional miners died in accidents involving violations of the Rules to Live By standards. In a look back over the past 10 years and excluding

Upper Big Branch, these same types of fatal accidents have occurred. We must take the lessons to be learned by these fatal accidents and act on them to prevent additional fatalities.

MSHA's Fatal Investigation reports on these fatalities are available at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/fab.htm> after they are completed.

The causes of the fatal accidents are as follows:

Seven metal and nonmetal miners are dead because they were involved in powered haulage accidents. Four surface coal-mine truck drivers were killed in powered haulage accidents when they lost control of their trucks and either struck another truck, turned over their trucks, or a truck went through a berm and over a highwall.

Six coal miners were killed working in close proximity to mining or haulage equipment.

Roof falls and rib rolls crushed 6 coal miners and 2 metal and nonmetal miners.

Six metal and nonmetal miners were killed when they were struck by falling material and two coal miners are dead because they were struck-by moving or falling objects.

Three metal and nonmetal miners died in machinery accidents.

One coal miner lost his life in an explosion or fire. One metal and nonmetal miner lost his life due to an exploding vessel and another from blasting; one metal and nonmetal miner died in a fall, another drowned, and one was electrocuted.

Each life lost is a tragedy for a family, a mining operation, and a community.

Fatalities are not inevitable in mining. They can be prevented, and we must take action now to prevent additional fatalities. Please review MSHA's analyses of the 2010 fatalities in coal mines and 2010 fatalities in metal and nonmetal mines. These analyses contain details on the fatalities, best practices on how to prevent them, and printable posters for your operation.

First and foremost, mine operators must take responsibility for the health and safety conditions in their mines to prevent these tragedies. Congress explicitly stated in the findings and purpose of the federal Mine Safety and Health Act that "deaths and serious injuries from unsafe and unhealthful conditions and practices in the coal or other mines cause grief and suffering to the miners and to their families ..." Congress clearly sought to end this grief and suffering. That Mine Act also makes clear that mine operators are responsible for maintaining safe and healthful workplaces in compliance with the laws, rules and regulations designed to improve mine safety and health in this country. That Mine Act obligates mine operators to, among other things, examine mines to find and fix conditions that could harm miners. The law is clear that operators must take ownership of safety and health at their mines.

The importance and value of effective safety and health management programs cannot be overstated. Effective safety and health management programs save lives. A thorough, systematic review of all tasks and equipment to identify hazards is the foundation of a well-designed safety and health management program. Modify equipment, processes, work procedures and management systems to eliminate or control identified hazards. Operators and contractors should create effective safety and health management programs, ensure that they are implemented, and periodically review, evaluate, and update them. If an accident or near miss does occur, find out why and act to prevent recurrence. If changes to equipment, materials or work processes introduce new risks into the mine environment, they must be addressed immediately.

Conducting workplace examinations before beginning a shift and during a shift – every shift – can prevent deaths by finding and fixing safety and health hazards. All required workplace examinations must be performed and identified problems resolved to protect workers.

Effective and appropriate training will help ensure that miners recognize and understand hazards and how to control or eliminate them.

Miners deserve a safe and healthy workplace and the right to go home to their families and loved ones safe and well at the end of every shift, every day. We must all work together to make that happen.



To the Mining Community:

While much of the public's attention was focused in 2010 on the tragedy at Upper Big Branch Mine that killed 29 miners, that disaster was not the only cause of mining deaths in this country in 2010. In total, 71 miners died on the job last year, compared to 34 in 2009. Forty-eight of those deaths occurred in coal mines: 29 coal miners were killed in the explosion at the Upper Big Branch mine in April and 19 additional coal miners lost their lives in other accidents. Twenty-three miners were killed at metal and nonmetal mining operations - 45 percent were contractors. Not including the Upper Big Branch-related deaths, it appears that more than half of the 42 additional miners died in accidents involving violations of the Rules to Live By standards. In a look back over the past 10 years and excluding Upper Big Branch, these same types of fatal accidents have occurred. We must take the lessons to be learned by these fatal accidents and act on them to prevent additional fatalities.

MSHA has summary information on its website www.msha.gov identifying causes of these mining fatalities for 2010, best practices to prevent them, posters for you to print and display in your operations, and other information on preventing fatalities in mining workplaces. Agency Fatal Investigation reports, when completed on each fatality, are available at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/fab.htm>.

Fatalities are not inevitable. They can be prevented by using effective **safety and health management programs** in your workplaces. **Workplace examinations** for hazards – pre-shift and on-shift every shift – can identify and eliminate hazards that kill and injure miners. And providing effective and appropriate **training** will help ensure that miners better recognize and understand hazards and how to control or eliminate them. Mine operators and Part 46 and Part 48 trainers need to train miners and mine supervisors on the conditions that lead to deaths and injuries and measures to prevent and avoid them.

Mining workplaces must be made safe for miners, and operators must ensure that health and safety measures are in place to protect them. Thousands of mines do that and work year in and year out without fatalities or reporting lost-time injuries.

If you have any questions or want more information on how to prevent fatalities, injuries and illnesses in mining workplaces, visit MSHA's website at www.msha.gov or call your local MSHA office.

Working together, we can improve mine safety and health in our nation's mines and send every miner home safe and healthy to friends and family after every shift, every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph A. Main". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Joseph A. Main
Assistant Secretary of Labor for
Mine Safety and Health