

From the Assistant Secretary's Desk  
First Quarter 2013 Fatality Analysis

Last year I began providing the mining industry, trainers and grantees quarterly information on the types of fatal accidents that are occurring in mining and the best practices to prevent them.

Below is a summary of information from the first quarter of 2013. MSHA's mission is to reduce fatalities, injuries and illnesses in our nation's mines.

From January 1, 2013 to March 31, 2013, eleven miners died in accidents in the mining industry. Eight were killed in coal mining accidents and three in metal and nonmetal mining accidents. Six coal miners were killed in less than one month, four of them in West Virginia, which led to increased actions by MSHA.

In coal mining, two miners died in **Machinery** accidents. Two miners were killed in **Powered Haulage** accidents, and two miners died as a result of **Roof Fall** accidents. One miner died as a result of an **Exploding Vessels Under Pressure** accident, and one miner was killed in a **Hoisting** accident. The first six fatalities in the coal mining industry occurred in just 25 days.

In metal and nonmetal mining, one miner died as a result of a **Fall of Highwall** accident. One miner was killed in a **Machinery** accident and one miner died in an **Explosives and Breaking Agents** accident.

MSHA has placed an analysis of the mining fatalities during the first quarter of 2013 on its website at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/summaries/summaries.asp> along with best practices to help mining operations avoid fatalities like them, and for trainers to include in miner training.

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, to 35 in 2012. Earlier this month, preliminary numbers released show 2012 had the lowest fatality rate in the history of U.S. mining, with .0107 deaths per 200,000 hours worked. The rate of reported injuries was 2.56 per 200,000 hour worked, also the lowest rate on record. These preliminary numbers show that actions undertaken by MSHA and the mining industry continue to move mine safety in the right direction. I believe that impact inspections, pattern of violation actions and other measures MSHA has taken, as well as the efforts made by the mining industry, are contributing factors to this record low number of fatalities and injuries.

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, with the assistance of miners, 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. The law is clear that operators must take ownership of safety and health at their mines.

While we have made progress, it is clear there is more to be done. 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.

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

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

MSHA has undertaken a number of measures to prevent mining deaths, injuries and illnesses: 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.

We know it has taken the efforts of all of us in MSHA and the mining industry to reach these new milestones. We also know that while mining deaths and injuries have reached historic lows, more action is needed by all to prevent mining injuries, illnesses and deaths.

No miner should have to die on the job just to earn a paycheck. Miners deserve a safe and healthful workplace, and assurances they can return home safe and healthy each day. We are all committed to making that happen.