



From the Assistant Secretary's Desk
Assistant Secretary discusses recent metal/nonmetal outreach and safety and health improvements

One of the best parts of my job as Assistant Secretary is getting out to mining communities and meeting with industry and labor, stakeholders, state agencies, our MSHA staff and others to share what we are doing at MSHA and why, and to hear what they have to say. Over the past three years MSHA staff and I have traveled across the country to mine sites and meetings with coal and metal/nonmetal stakeholders to exchange information and get feedback from the mining community. These visits have been highly successful.

In the most recent round of outreach to the metal/nonmetal mining industry, metal/nonmetal Administrator Neal Merrifield or I recently traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio; Albuquerque, NM; and Seattle, WA to visit with industry and labor stakeholders - my third trip to the Midwest and second to the west. We visited state aggregate associations representing about a dozen states in the Midwest and west, labor organizations in all three areas, MSHA offices and staff, a state mining agency and metal/nonmetal mines and facilities. The National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association also participated in a number of these events. See slide show at [http:// www.msha.gov /FromtheDesk/10012012/PhotoGallery10012012.asp](http://www.msha.gov/FromtheDesk/10012012/PhotoGallery10012012.asp). The mine and facility visits are always a great part of these trips, because we spend time discussing safety and health issues directly with mine operation managers, miners and miners' representatives. These visits and discussions reinforced what we've heard previously - that MSHA is moving in the right direction.

During my visits, some of our initiatives that were well received included the guarding power point we initiated in 2010 which has resulted in improved compliance with a 39% reduction in violations since implementation; our "Rules To Live By" campaign which targets common mining deaths; our recent policy initiative on fall

protection that recognized OSHA's standards; increased attention on workers voice; implementing pre-assessment conferences to allow resolution of disputes over citations and orders before litigation; our approach to discuss new initiatives with stakeholders and share our training before implementation of those; and MSHA's efforts to improve communications with industry stakeholders and consistency in enforcement. I also discussed MSHA's strategic impact inspection and potential pattern of violations programs and evidence that mines undergoing these programs are improving compliance and reducing injuries. Overall compliance is improving with implementation of these initiatives by MSHA and the mining community and other actions undertaken by the mining community. Statistics showing the improvement can be viewed on the MSHA website at <http://www.msha.gov/MSHAINFO/FactSheets/MSHAFCT10.HTM>.

Success with our initiatives is attributed to engaging early with industry and labor stakeholders to explain what MSHA was doing and why, and to identify improvements that would be most effective in meeting our common goal of providing a safer workplace for our nation's miners. This engagement was a major change I introduced at MSHA soon after my arrival with the rollout of the "Rules To Live By" and other initiatives.

We continue to improve and expand on our successful programs based on the positive feedback we've received and to look at other areas where improvements can be made. We continue our safety and health outreach and compliance assistance efforts as we fully implement enforcement of the Mine Act, and will shortly release our next installment of our guarding compliance assistance for the metal/nonmetal industry which were piloted with both mining association and labor stakeholders.

All these are driven by the goal of keeping miners safe and healthy on the job and returning them to their families at the end of every shift every day. Although we all know more needs to be done, we have been reaching benchmarks never before achieved in mine safety

such as the fatal and injury/illness rates in 2011, which were the lowest recorded in history. For metal/nonmetal, the 2011 rates were noticeable reductions - the fatal injury rate was .0084, compared to .0092 in 2009, and the all injury rate was 2.28, compared to the next lowest of 2.37 in 2010. These statistics are available at <http://www.msha.gov/MSHAINFO/FactSheets/MSHAFCT10.HTM>. I do believe we are moving mine safety in the right direction, let's keep it going that way.