

From the Assistant Secretary's Desk — 4th quarter/2013 end-of-year fatality summaries and wrap up

In 2013, 42 miners died in work-related accidents at the nation's mines, an increase of six over last year. Of those fatalities, 20 were in coal mining and 22 were in metal/nonmetal mining, compared with 20 and 16, respectively, in 2012. While MSHA and the entire mining community have made a number of improvements and have been moving mine safety in the right direction in the past few years, the increased number of fatalities in 2013 makes clear we need to do more to protect our nation's miners.

Progress made in mine safety in recent years also lets us know that greater improvements are achievable. Preliminary fatality and injury rate data for the first three quarters of 2013 were .0112 and 2.45, respectively, below the rates for the same period in 2012, which marked the lowest fatal and injury rates recorded in a calendar year in mining history. That replaced the prior record for the lowest fatal and injury rates in mining set in 2011. [Note: Rates are determined by the number of fatalities or injuries per 200,000 hours worked. Rates for calendar year 2013, which are calculated using operator-reported employment hours, are not yet available.]

The first three quarters of 2013 also contributed to the lowest fatal and injury rates and the fewest number of mining deaths ever recorded in mining in a fiscal year. For fiscal year 2013 (Oct. 1, 2012 through Sept. 30, 2013), preliminary data indicate a record-low fatality rate of .0104 and injury rate of 2.42, as well as the fewest number of mining deaths at 33.

The fourth quarter of 2013, however, did not follow that trend. Six coal miners and nine metal/nonmetal miners died in mining accidents during the final quarter of 2013, a significant increase

from the same period in 2012, when four coal miners and two metal/nonmetal miners died. Further information on these fatalities and best practices to prevent them are being provided to mining industry stakeholders, including mine operators, miners and trainers. That information, as well as information on fatalities that occurred earlier this year can be found at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/summaries/summaries.asp>.

Of the total mining deaths in 2013, fourteen of the coal mining deaths occurred underground and six occurred at surface operations. In metal/nonmetal mining, five deaths occurred underground, and 17 occurred at surface operations.

Four mining deaths in 2013 – two in coal and two in metal/nonmetal - involved contractors marking the fewest number of contractor deaths since MSHA began maintaining contractor data in 1983.

The most common causes of mining accidents in 2013 for both coal and metal/nonmetal involved machinery and powered haulage equipment. West Virginia had the most coal mining deaths, with six, and Kentucky had the most metal/nonmetal mining deaths, with four. Nine states experienced coal mining deaths and 14 states had deaths at metal/nonmetal mining operations. A state breakdown of where the mining deaths occurred can be found at <http://www.msha.gov/stats/charts/chartshome.htm>.

As noted on our mid-year and third quarter fatality summaries, coal mining fatalities continue to occur that could have been prevented with proximity detection equipment. As of December 2013, more than 380 proximity detection systems had been installed on continuous mining machines and other mobile equipment. Of those, 287 are on continuous mining machines and 100 are on other mobile equipment. This year four fatalities

occurred that could have been prevented with proximity detection systems.

In metal/nonmetal, five of the fatalities in 2013 occurred as a result of failing to Lock Out and Tag Out equipment power sources. These accidents could have been prevented by electrically disconnecting power and assuring it is OFF, having the power source locked in the safe position, and attaching a personal safety lock and tag to prevent reconnection and re-energization. These accidents would not have occurred had the power been disconnected and locked out.

To prevent deaths, mine operators must maintain 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. Among the measures MSHA has undertaken to prevent mining deaths are 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 with the mining community.

Mining deaths are preventable, and those that occurred in 2013 are no exception. While we have made a number of improvements and have been moving mine safety in the right direction, the increased number of metal and nonmetal deaths makes clear we need to do more to protect our nation’s miners.

It takes the entire mining community to continue to reach new milestones in health and safety. Miners need the reassurance that they will return home safe and healthy after every shift.

An analysis of these mining fatalities is available 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.