

From the Desk – Alpha Training Center

On June 20, 2013, Coal Administrator Kevin Stricklin, and MSHA district officials and I had the opportunity to attend the opening of Alpha Natural Resources' Running Right Leadership Academy in Julian, WV. The new mine safety education and training center is a state-of-the-art skills and mine emergency training facility that will be used to train miners, mine managers, mine rescue teams and others using a variety of virtual reality simulators and a mine lab.

The training center was developed by Alpha Natural Resources as part of the December 6, 2011, non-prosecution agreement with the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia and the United States Department of Justice following Alpha's purchase of the Massey Energy mines after the tragic April 5, 2010 mine disaster that claimed 29 miners' lives at the Upper Big Branch Mine.

Credit must go to the Department of Justice and the US Attorney's office for their foresight in reaching an agreement with Alpha resulting in this modern, multi-purpose training facility.

The facility includes: classroom space for up to 300 people; a mine lab with 96,000 square feet to simulate mine situations and conditions; a virtual reality lab with simulators to provide training on a continuous mining machine, roof bolter, scoop and haul truck; multiple labs for electrical, maintenance and welding training; facilities and equipment for supervisory leadership skills training; and a command center for mine rescue and emergency preparedness training. Mine emergency rescue personnel must be ready to respond at a moment's notice to volunteer to find and rescue fellow miners in some of the most extreme conditions imaginable. This training facility provides the means to prepare mine rescue personnel for encountering those conditions. Having personally participated in mine emergency response and recovery, I truly appreciate how much mine rescue personnel do to be ready to respond.

During the June 20th event, Alpha also demonstrated the results of research and development undertaken as part of the December 6, 2011 agreement. Attendees had the opportunity to observe a new system for continuous atmospheric monitoring of mine gases and air to detect

problems that can lead to mine fires and explosions at the early stages; the advanced cascading oxygen systems for miners to use during escape; a new mine refuge escape device; and the new Coal Dust Explosibility Meter used for testing the explosiveness of coal dust to prevent coal dust explosions. They also displayed a proximity device installed in a continuous mining machines designed to protect miners from crushing injuries. This work will help advance research in these devices and systems which will eventually better serve the safety and health needs of miners.

For a slideshow of the facility click [here](#).