

News Release



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Contact: Amy Louviere
Phone: 202-693-9423

MSHA fines River Hill Coal Co. Inc. \$177,300 *River Hill Tipple assessed for 7 violations*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) today announced it has assessed \$177,300 in fines against River Hill Coal Co. Inc. for significant accumulations of coal float dust, unsafe operating conditions associated with a rotary breaker, inadequate guarding and unsafe structure of a building at the River Hill Tipple in Clearfield County, Pa.

“These types of cleaning plants must undergo daily examinations by mine personnel,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary for mine safety and health. “It’s hard to believe that someone would not have recognized the unsafe conditions that existed and that could have led to a catastrophe.”

During an inspection in November 2007, the MSHA inspector noted that the mine foreman had allowed coal dust in the air and on the entire bottom floor of the crusher building to accumulate in dangerous amounts. The dust ranged from float dust to 3 feet in depth in certain places around the raw coal belt, breaker and feeder. The float dust accumulated on electric motors, an electrical disconnect switch and starter boxes, lighting and the plant structures. In addition, two of the required water sprays were functioning improperly, well within sight of two workers. According to the inspection reports, some of these conditions had been reoccurring over the past two years and cited previously by MSHA.

The inspection report also found that the BC belt operating in the ground floor of the new cleaning plant was not guarded adequately to prevent a person from reaching in and being caught by the tail roller. Guarding protections also showed signs of heavy deterioration due to rusting and had been in that condition for some time.

Finally, the mine foreman failed to maintain the rotary break in safe operating condition. The dust housing had deteriorated and rusted, and openings in the dust housing area allowed coal, coal dust and float coal dust to accumulate in dangerous amounts on electrical motors, an electrical disconnect switch and starter boxes, lighting and the building structure.

The mine operator was cited four times for accumulations of coal dust, once for unsafe operating conditions associated with a rotary breaker, once for inadequate guarding and once for an unsafe structure of a building.

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