

News Release



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MSHA fines Highland Mining Co. \$180,000

Hazardous conditions at Freeze Fork mine should have been obvious to management

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) announced it has assessed \$180,000 in fines against Highland Mining Co., which operates the Freeze Fork Surface Mine in Logan County, W.Va. A miner was injured last February at the mine when a section of highwall fell on his haul truck. MSHA issued three contributory violations as a result of that accident.

On Feb. 9, 2008, a miner suffered shoulder and neck injuries when a section of a highwall collapsed, partially burying his Caterpillar haulage truck. The narrow pit measured 70 to 80 feet wide, and rock trucks traveled near the highwall to be loaded and remove overburden. The mine’s ground control plan required 20-foot wide safety benches, which are ledges or steps that prevent material from rolling down into the pit where excavation of the coal seam takes place. MSHA had found a 40-foot section of highwall without benches that had not been corrected by the operator’s safety examiners for at least two shifts. That section of highwall also had obvious loose, cracked, unconsolidated rock that presented a hazard to miners working in the area.

“The dangerous conditions at the highwall were visibly apparent, and management took no steps to limit the exposure of the rock truck drivers, who were traveling by this wall several times a day,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health.

MSHA has issued an unwarrantable citation for failure to protect miners from the highwall, and two unwarrantable orders for failure to follow the ground control plan and to adequately examine the highwall. The citation and two orders were assessed at \$60,000 each.

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