

News Release



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MSHA launches 2nd phase of ‘Rules to Live By’ enforcement initiative

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today launched the second phase of an outreach and enforcement program designed to strengthen efforts to prevent mining fatalities. “Rules to Live By II: Preventing Catastrophic Accidents” was developed from data gathered by reviewing accidents that resulted in five or more fatalities, as well as from incidents caused by fires or explosions that had the potential to result in more fatalities.

MSHA analyzed citation data from eight accidents at underground coal mines that took place between 2000 and 2009, and resulted in the deaths of 47 miners. These accidents occurred at Willow Creek, Jim Walters No. 5, McElroy, Sago, Aracoma Alma Mine No. 1, Darby Mine No. 1, R & D Coal Co. and Crandall Canyon. In developing the second phase of “Rules to Live By,” MSHA reviewed these accidents to identify conditions and practices contributing to the accident, safety standards violated, root causes and abatement practices. The April 5 explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine is not included, but MSHA plans to update “Rules to Live By II” when the investigation of that accident is complete.

“Too many miners have lost their lives in catastrophic accidents over the past 10 years,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “That is simply unacceptable.

“The goal of ‘Rules to Live By II’ is to prevent major accidents – from fires to explosions – that could be disasters by having mine operators identify and correct all hazardous conditions, and direct MSHA enforcement toward confirming that violations relating to these standards and conditions are not present at mines. We are committed to scrutinizing the data on deaths in the mining industry and getting at the leading causes of those deaths to prevent subsequent ones,” said Main.

In its analysis of the violations contributing to one or more of the eight accidents, MSHA identified nine coal standards. The standards fell into one of four categories: explosions, aftermath of a fire, mining methods and examinations. MSHA is also focusing special attention on two other standards dealing with combustible materials and rockdusting to prevent coal mine fires and explosions.

As with the initial 24 standards highlighted during the first “Rules to Live By” initiative, MSHA will begin with outreach to the mining community. Enforcement personnel will focus more attention on these standards through enhanced enforcement and increased scrutiny for violations of these standards. Inspectors will be instructed to carefully evaluate gravity and negligence, consistent with the seriousness of the violation, when citing violations of standards that may cause or contribute to mining fatalities. Information is also being sent to state grantees, who provide training to the mining industry.

The first “Rules to Live By” initiative, launched earlier this year, focused on standards that were frequently cited in fatal accident investigations from January 2000 through December 2008. MSHA inspectors will begin enhanced enforcement efforts for the second phase on Jan. 1, 2011.

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