

News Release



U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
Release Number: 10-1779-NAT

For Immediate Release
Dec. 22, 2010
Contact: Amy Louviere Jesse Lawder
Phone: 202-693-9423 202-693-4659

MSHA proposes revisions to examination requirements in underground coal mines *Rule underscores mine operators' responsibility for conducting safety and health examinations*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced a proposal to revise its requirements for pre-shift, supplemental, on-shift and weekly examinations. The proposed rule on Examinations of Work Areas in Underground Coal Mines for Violations of Mandatory Health or Safety Standards would require mine operators to take responsibility for conducting complete workplace examinations; correcting violations; and reviewing with mine examiners on a quarterly basis all citations and orders issued in areas where pre-shift, supplemental, on-shift and weekly examinations are required.

“Examinations are the first line of defense for miners working in underground coal mines,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “Mine operators must take ownership for their workers’ health and safety by conducting basic workplace examinations to assure they are in compliance with health and safety standards.”

“At the beginning of the shift, miners in an underground coal mine are particularly vulnerable to hazards and conditions in the workplace that may have developed during the prior shift. The examinations are intended to protect them,” Main said.

Under the existing standard for pre-shift, supplemental, on-shift and weekly examinations, operators are required to identify, correct and record hazardous conditions. The proposal would apply to these examinations and would require that operators also identify, correct and record violations of mandatory health or safety standards.

MSHA reviewed accident investigation reports and the agency’s enforcement data on underground coal mines, and concluded that the agency needed to propose changes to the existing examination requirements. By reviewing records and data over a five-year period, MSHA determined that the same types of violations of mandatory health or safety standards are found by MSHA inspectors in underground coal mines every year.

Violations for accumulations of combustible materials, ventilation and roof control plans, and maintenance of incombustible content of rock dust are the top 10 cited safety standards year after year. These standards accounted for about 40 percent of the total violations at underground coal mines in 2009. Under the proposal, MSHA intends that an examiner looking for violations of mandatory health or safety standards would identify these types of violations and correct many conditions before miners suffer injury, illness or death.

“Last year, MSHA inspectors issued 82,126 citations and orders at underground coal mines,” said Main. “These violations should be found and fixed by mine operators, not left for MSHA to find.”

###

U.S. Department of Labor releases are accessible on the Internet at <http://www.dol.gov>. The information in this news release will be made available in alternate format (large print, Braille, audio tape or disc) from the COAST office upon request. Please specify which news release when placing your request at 202-693-7828 or TTY 202-693-7755. The Labor Department is committed to providing America’s employers and employees with easy access to understandable information on how to comply with its laws and regulations. For more information, please visit <http://www.dol.gov/compliance>.