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MSHA creates additional district office to oversee southern West Virginia coal mines

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that it will split the agency’s jurisdiction over southern West Virginia coal mines into two separate districts, a process that will begin in the second quarter of fiscal year 2011. Of the nation’s 2,100 coal mines, approximately 400 fall within the existing District 4 boundaries.

The District 4 office, located in Mt. Hope, W.Va., currently has the most employees of all MSHA’s 11 coal districts, as well as the most extensive workload with the smallest ratio of managers and supervisors to line staff. It is responsible for 27 percent of all mechanized mining units in the nation, compared to 14 percent in the next closest district. In FY 2009, District 4 issued 23,282 citations, 47 percent more than the next most active district in the nation.

A new District 12 Office will be located in Pineville, W.Va., and staffed by positions reallocated from District 4 and other districts. The new district manager, once hired, will create an organizational structure similar to other districts that are comparable in size.

“Resources must be reallocated to allow MSHA’s coal division to effectively carry out its mission, including new administration initiatives designed to strengthen health and safety protections for the nation’s miners,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “MSHA is committed to implementing management reforms that will increase the agency’s efficiency and effectiveness within a significantly constrained budget framework.”

Costs associated with setting up the new office are estimated at \$491,000. Annual rental costs are estimated at \$634,000. These above-base funds are included in the president’s FY 2012 budget request.

Although coal production is declining in some districts, the increase in production of southern West Virginia coal, with its high carbon and low sulfur content, appears to be a long-term trend.

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