



News Release

Connect with DOL at
<http://social.dol.gov!>



U.S. Department of Labor For Immediate Release
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
Release Number: 11-454-PHI

March 29, 2011
Contact: Amy Louviere
Phone: 202-693-9423
E-mail: louviere.amy@dol.gov

MSHA to hold public briefing June 29 on investigation of Upper Big Branch Mine explosion

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that it will hold a briefing on June 29 to share with the public information gathered during the investigation of the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, W.Va. The briefing will coincide with the one-year anniversary of the start of the underground investigation at the Upper Big Branch Mine and will be held at the National Mine Health and Safety Academy in Beckley, W.Va. Although the underground investigation and interviews are still ongoing, MSHA investigators will be able to compile additional relevant evidence by June in order to provide a substantive presentation to the public.

MSHA already has shared information with the families of the victims through several meetings and has released information gained during the course of the investigation on the agency’s “Upper Big Branch Mine-South Massey Energy Co. Single Source Page” available at <http://www.msha.gov/PerformanceCoal/PerformanceCoal.asp>.

In June, MSHA intends to provide an overview of the physical evidence gathered in its investigation, as well as summaries of other evidence obtained by investigators. As has been the practice throughout this investigation, some information will remain confidential in light of the ongoing U.S. Department of Justice criminal investigation and requests by federal prosecutors to MSHA to limit the public release of evidence relevant to potential prosecutions. President Obama has instructed both agencies to conduct thorough investigations into the tragedy, and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

“We take very seriously the need to keep the public informed as to what we’re learning and when we’re learning it,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “We also take seriously the efforts of the FBI and the U.S. attorney to bring to justice those who may have broken the law. Throughout this investigation, we’ve worked hard to balance those important goals.”

Since the passage of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, MSHA has conducted investigations in all fatality cases to determine the cause, identify any violations and assess penalties. There have been approximately 4,000 fatalities since 1977. Over the years, it has been the general practice of the agency to include records and information developed during the investigation with the release of the investigation report at the conclusion of the investigation. The current investigation into the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion and the inquiry into the 2006 Sago Mine disaster are among the few examples in which records have been released as the investigation has progressed, and the Upper Big Branch Mine investigation has been one of the most transparent in MSHA’s history. MSHA will continue to make publicly available relevant information that will not compromise MSHA’s investigation or the ongoing criminal investigation.

###