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## MSHA announces results of May impact inspections

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that federal inspectors issued 186 citations and nine orders during special impact inspections conducted at nine coal mines and five metal/nonmetal mines last month.

The monthly inspections, which began in force in April 2010 following the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine, involve mines that merit increased agency attention and enforcement due to their poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns. These matters include high numbers of violations or closure orders; frequent hazard complaints or hotline calls; plan compliance issues; inadequate workplace examinations; a high number of accidents, injuries or illnesses; fatalities; adverse conditions such as increased methane liberation, faulty roof conditions and inadequate ventilation; and respirable dust.

As an example from last month, MSHA conducted an impact inspection during the May 8 evening shift at Tram Energy LLC #1, in Floyd County, Ky., during which inspectors issued 23 citations and six unwarrantable failure orders. These include mining without required dust controls in place, failure to conduct adequate belt examinations, damaged conveyor belt structure and accumulations of combustible materials. On May 21, an additional 104(d)(2) order was issued for failure to conduct adequate examinations of the electrical mining equipment. As a result, the entire underground portion of the mine was shut down until May 30.

The mine’s ventilation plan requires a minimum air velocity of 4,000 cubic feet per minute where coal is being cut to direct dust away from miners. MSHA found a coal cutting machine operating with no air movement and no line curtain to control airflow. Visible float dust was observed suspended in the air. These conditions exposed miners to a potential explosion and increased their risk of developing black lung and other respiratory diseases.

The mine operator failed to conduct adequate pre-shift examinations prior to permitting miners underground. MSHA cited hazardous conditions that should have been recognized by an adequate examination, including missing cones to mark an intersection of rail track, failure to maintain a refuge alternative within 1,000 feet of the working face, no sign indicating a door in the primary escapeway, and accumulations of combustible materials.

Combustible materials, including loose coal, coal, coal and float dust, and debris, were under and in the adjacent entries and crosscuts along the entire length of the #1 belt conveyor and on the roof, ribs, floor and electrical installations along the #2 belt conveyor for three crosscuts. Hazardous conditions on the #1 conveyor belt flight were neither recorded in the record book nor corrected. The mine has been cited 32 times for similar violations over the past two years. Violations also were issued pertaining to the mine’s approved emergency response plan. The communications and tracking system required to track the locations of miners in the event of a mine emergency was not functioning.

“While statistics on compliance with regulations and fatality and injury rates show mine safety is moving in the right direction, not all mines are cooperating,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “The conditions our inspectors observed at Tram Energy LLC #1, which resulted in the closure of the mine for more than three weeks, demonstrated a complete disregard for the health and safety of miners and for safe mining practices.”

Since April 2010, MSHA has conducted 616 impact inspections and issued 10,483 citations, 970 orders and 44 safeguards.

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