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Examinations of Working Places in Metal and Nonmetal Mines. 30 CFR Parts 56 and 57

Comment On: MSHA-2014-0030-0001

Examinations of Working Places in Metal and Nonmetal Mines

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Comment from Casey Bell, NA

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General Comment

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) is proposing to amend the Agency's standards for the examination of working places in metal and nonmetal (MNM) mines. The proposed guidelines include conducting an examination of the working place prior to the miners begin work in an area, notification to the workers if any adverse conditions exist in the working area and an examination record be completed before the end of each working shift. Corrective actions, if any are taken, should be documented on the report and be available for all workers to view at any given time. These guidelines proposed by the MSHA are intended to enhance the quality of the mining work place by improving protection for workers and to improve overall health and safety for the people working in metal and nonmetal (MNM) mines.

I believe that the proposal rule has good intentions but it seems to fail to take into consideration the miners themselves. Adding more and more steps before miners can work is tedious and can hinder the amount of productive time spent in the mines. When workers are less productive, the yield is smaller and not as much revenue is generated. The decrease in revenue could lead to miners being let go from the mines and potentially could cause the mining industry to dry up in the United States. If the proposed changes are implemented, it cannot happen overnight. In the meantime, mining accidents could still occur. When the examination and report procedure is in place, the "competent person" will have to be trained thoroughly on the documentation process in a way that is standardized across the board, and across the country for all mines. The additional job responsibility warrants a pay raise due to the extra duties and time spent documenting and inspecting. Additionally, and most importantly, the new procedures do not

AB87-COMM-30

8/17/2016

teach workers in MNM mines how to be safer while working; the procedures just tack on additional responsibilities for workers. If time was spent to train employees on how to be safe while working and to notice conditions that may affect their health or safety, additional regulations may in fact become obsolete. According to a MSHA News Release in September 2015, \$8.4 million in grant funding was awarded to 47 states to assist in reducing mining accidents and injuries by supporting safety and health training courses (Louviere, 2015). The grants will pay for training and retraining of miners that work in a variety of settings.

On the contrary, additional guidelines put in place could serve as a catalyst for mine safety in the future. The MSHA proposal states that records and corrective action would lead to increased communication and generate a culture of safety and health. If mines are safer and fewer accidents and injuries occur, employee satisfaction could be higher and fewer personal days off taken. Satisfaction could be improved because miners would be more informed about the workplace conditions and what was done to correct any flaws at any given time. The more informed a person is, the more likely they feel in control of a situation. The "competent person" in charge of the corrective action would be held accountable for solutions therefore would hold themselves to a higher standard. I can imagine that if someone from within the mine is held responsible for corrective action then the job would be completed more thoroughly as opposed to an outsider completing the fix. The "competent person" works in the mine where the fix is needed therefore they would choose to not haphazardly assess and fix conditions found. Communication between workers would facilitate collaboration and a better workplace environment due to the formed relationships and comradery.

All in all, I believe that the proposed guidelines by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) are good in theory but not quite ready to be implemented. While the documentation and inspections prior to working are important, more time spent looking before a day can start could result in decreased work days and productivity to slow to a crawl. In order to have my full support, I believe that miners should be trained extensively to recognize hazardous situations and be able to take corrective action on their own quickly but thoroughly. Ultimately, regardless of the decisions made, the safety and health of workers is of utmost importance and the platform that all should stand and agree on.