

From the desk...

I am pleased to announce MSHA's latest initiative in Metal/NonMetal: A new guide on ladder safety that will provide greater clarity and assistance for complying with MSHA ladder safety standards.

Similar to successful guarding initiatives developed in 2010 and 2012, the ladder guide consists of a slide presentation that is being posted on our website today at <http://www.msha.gov/FocusOn/Stakeholders252014/Stakeholders252014.asp>. It will serve as the basis for a series of inspector trainings on ladder safety in the coming months, and will ensure that MSHA inspectors, miners and mine operators are all working with the same information.

The guide was developed in response to inquiries from stakeholders seeking clarification about ladders and ladder use, and was piloted with stakeholders.

The improper use and maintenance of ladders in metal/nonmetal mines can have serious consequences, including injuries and death. As with other compliance initiatives undertaken by the agency in recent years, I expect our ladder safety guide will result in improved compliance, more consistent enforcement, and, ultimately, reduced injuries and deaths of miners.

Major areas covered include: Ladder construction and maintenance; requirements specific to fixed and portable ladders; underground ladders and travelways; and the differentiation between ladder standards and safe access standards. Photographs in the presentation clearly show proper and improper practices, and note which conditions would be cited in an inspection.

Two fatal accidents are highlighted to underscore the dangers: In one, a miner fell 47 feet from a stepladder that had been set up on an elevated work platform. The use of personal fall protection equipment would have saved his life. In the second, sections of a portable extension ladder were separated and the upper section – without slip-resistant bases -- was used. The bottom of the ladder slid on the concrete floor and the miner fell over a handrail, a total of 39 feet. The use of proper slip-resistant bases would have prevented that accident.

By working collaboratively with all of our stakeholders on initiatives like these, compliance and injuries have improved. For instance, in 2010, the agency issued Guarding I, a guide on Belt Conveyor Guarding. Two years later, a second guide was

issued to cover all other types of machinery guarding. As a result, operator compliance on guarding improved significantly and consistency of enforcement improved markedly.

Similarly, compliance improved following the 2012 publication of an MSHA Program Policy Letter on "Safety Belts and Lines", as shown by a more than 25% decrease in fall protection citations and orders in metal/nonmetal.

I hope all those who are interested in mine safety will take a moment to look through the presentation and learn how ladders in mine operations can be built, maintained and used with safety in mind.