

# News Release



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## **US Labor Department's MSHA expands Upper Big Branch explosion investigation team, names internal review team** *Anonymous tip line established to gather additional information about blast*

**ARLINGTON, Va.** – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced the formation of a supplemental investigation group to augment the efforts of the agency's accident investigation team to determine the cause of the explosion that occurred April 5 at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, W.Va. This investigation group will be led by former MSHA employee Robert Phillips, a 27-year veteran of the agency and, prior to his recent retirement, manager of the Coal Mine Safety and Health District Office in Vincennes, Ind.

Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis called for this additional investigation group to provide a safe, confidential venue for the general public, family members of the victims and miners to speak freely to MSHA investigators about the mine explosion without fear of retaliation or the need to reveal their identities.

"We need to use every available tool to establish the cause of this tragedy that took 29 coal miners' lives," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. "The work of this special team will be part of MSHA's investigative process, and it will give family members and others the opportunity to share information they might otherwise not feel comfortable passing along."

The additional MSHA investigation group will monitor and respond to an anonymous tip line that victims' relatives and members of the general public can use to convey information that may be relevant to the accident investigation. The phone number is 877-827-3966.

MSHA also announced today the formation of an internal review team to evaluate the actions of the agency prior to the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine and to make recommendations for improvements where appropriate. The internal review team, headed by Jack Kuzar, manager of the Coal Mine Safety and Health District Office in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., will compare MSHA's actions with the requirements of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, its standards and implementing regulations, and MSHA policies and procedures.

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