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## After Two Years of Sorrow, A Reflection and a Promise

by [Secretary Hilda Solis](#) on [April 5, 2012](#) · [0 comments](#)

Today marks the second anniversary of the [worst U.S. coal mining disaster in nearly four decades](#), as well as the single most heartbreaking day of my tenure as U.S. Secretary of Labor. The day after the explosion at Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia, I went to the site and sat vigil with the family members and loved ones of the miners who were trapped underground. We prayed for a miracle that never came. I will never forget the 29 men who perished in an explosion that ripped through the chambers of the mine, the two miners who were seriously injured, or their loved ones.

Since then, MSHA has introduced tough new practices to counteract the type of misdeeds that were so prevalent at Upper Big Branch under Massey Energy. Joe Main, my assistant secretary of labor for MSHA, testified to Congress last week detailing the steps the agency is taking to make sure that we never again see such a senseless loss of life among miners. Our impact inspection program, which targets mines with chronic compliance problems, is an important new tool in our enforcement efforts. Many of the surprise inspections conducted under this program have forced mine operators to shut down production until they have addressed hazards.

Joe and his team are also making sure that we hold mine operators more accountable. A new rule to be published April 6 and effective in August, requires underground coal mine operators to examine their mines more thoroughly by finding and fixing common violations, including some of those that were cited in the investigation of the UBB mine disaster.

We have more to do. We cannot allow mine operators to hide hazards from inspectors, which was a major problem at many Massey mines. We need stronger criminal penalties for rogue operators who skirt the law, enhanced whistleblower protections so that miners can speak out about safety, and a host of other reforms.

Mines across the country operate productively every day while adhering to sound health and safety programs. There is never an excuse for cutting corners on worker protection. Employers should never put profits over people. If every mine operator meets its legal obligation to ensure the safety and health of its workers, we can prevent another tragedy like Upper Big Branch from ever happening again.

On this sad occasion, I commit to ensuring the full human dignity of every coal miner by pursuing violators with the full force of the law. And I vow that those miners and families who suffered so grievously two years ago – and every day since – will never be far from my thoughts.

For more information, watch MSHA Assistant Secretary Joseph Main's video message: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/media/webcast/20120402-msha/index.htm>.

Tagged as: [impact inspection program](#), [Joseph Main](#), [Massey Energy](#), [mine safety](#), [Mine Safety & Health Administration \(MSHA\)](#), [MINER Act](#), [miners](#), [Safety](#), [Secretary Hilda Solis](#), [UBB](#), [Upper Big Branch mine](#), [Workplace Safety](#)

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