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Coal Mine Safety and Health  

SUBJECT: Reissue of P10-V-6 - Bleeder System Examinations  

Scope  
This Program Policy Letter (PPL) applies to underground coal mine operators, miners' representatives, independent contractors, and Coal Mine Safety and Health (CMS&H) enforcement personnel.  

Purpose  
This PPL addresses bleeder system examinations in accordance with both the weekly examination requirements under 30 C.F.R. § 75.364(a)(2) and the preshift examination requirements under 30 C.F.R. § 75.360.  

Policy  
The weekly examination under 30 C.F.R. § 75.364(a)(2) requires that at least every 7 days, a certified person shall evaluate the effectiveness of bleeder systems required by § 75.334. Title 30 C.F.R. § 75.334 requires that the approved ventilation plan specify the design and use of bleeder systems; the means to determine the effectiveness of bleeder systems; the means for adequately maintaining bleeder entries free of obstructions such as roof falls and standing water; and the location of ventilating devices such as regulators, stoppings and bleeder connectors used to control air movement through the worked-out area.  

Recent accidents, near misses and enforcement history relating to bleeder systems show that additional resources need to be devoted to the inspection and evaluation of worked-out areas. District Managers and personnel in the plan review and inspection process should pay special attention to the ventilation plan contents relating to roof support, removal of standing water, location of ventilation controls, and maintaining
adequate ventilation to assure the air where miners work or travel, including mine
examiners conducting required examinations, contains at least 19.5 percent oxygen and
is sufficient to dilute, render harmless and carry away flammable, explosive, noxious,
and harmful gases, dust, smoke, and fumes.

One entry of each set of bleeder entries used as part of a bleeder system must be
traveled in its entirety each week. Some mine operators employ a “buddy system”
when conducting weekly examinations of the bleeder system where two persons travel
into the bleeder with the expectation that if one person becomes incapacitated, the other
person would be able to provide assistance or obtain help. Unless both persons are
certified mine examiners, the practice of sending a noncertified person to accompany
the mine examiner is a violation of 30 C.F.R. § 75.360, which prohibits persons other
than certified examiners from entering or remaining in an underground area unless a
preshift examination has been completed. As a safety practice, mine operators may
send two certified persons together to conduct the examinations. However,
noncertified persons are not permitted to travel bleeders or any other area of an
underground coal mine where a preshift examination has not been completed.

Background
On November 23, 2009, a mine foreman, who was a certified person, was accompanied
by another miner, who was not a certified person, during the weekly examination in the
bleeder. The two miners encountered a humid and unusually hot atmosphere as they
traveled in the bleeder entries. Both miners became incapacitated and the noncertified
miner died.

Authority
The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, as amended, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. and
30 C.F.R. §§ 75.360 and 75.364(a)(2).

Internet Availability
This information may be viewed on the Internet by accessing MSHA’s home page, then
choosing "Compliance Info" and "Program Policy Letters."

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