

News Release



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MSHA announces results of October impact inspections

Underground coal mine with highest number of closure orders among 19 operations

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration today announced that federal inspectors issued 380 citations and orders during special impact inspections conducted at 13 coal and six metal/nonmetal mine operations last month.

Impact inspections involve mines that merit increased agency attention and enforcement due to their poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns, including high numbers of violations or closure orders; indications of operator tactics, such as advance notification of inspections that prevent inspectors from observing violations; frequent hazard complaints or hotline calls; plan compliance issues; inadequate workplace examinations; a high number of accidents, injuries or illnesses; fatalities; and adverse conditions such as increased methane liberation, faulty roof conditions and inadequate ventilation.

During October’s impact inspections, the inspected coal mines were issued 286 citations and 14 orders. For metal/nonmetal mines, 74 citations and six orders were issued.

“Since April, MSHA has conducted 160 impact inspections across the country,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “One of the lessons we’ve learned is that business as usual won’t change the behavior of mine operators who game the system and refuse to take seriously their responsibility for miners’ safety and health. This has been a wake-up call for even the most resistant mine operators.”

From Nov. 1, 2009, to Oct. 31, 2010, Left Fork Mining Co.’s Straight Creek No. 1 Mine in Bell County, Ky., received 92 closure orders, the highest number issued among approximately 14,500 mining operations in the United States.

On Oct. 29, a nine-member inspection team from MSHA arrived at Straight Creek No. 1 Mine. Two of the inspectors captured and monitored the phones at two surface locations to ensure there would be no advance notification of the inspection to miners working underground. Straight Creek previously was cited and issued an injunction in federal court for that illegal activity.

During an examination of the only working section of the mine as well as a spot check on four separate outby conveyor belt lines, inspectors issued 15 citations and five orders. Citations for the violations concerned belt alignment and defective rollers, roof control, fire protection standards, calibration of a gas detector, equipment maintenance, and electrical and ventilation issues.

The five orders concerned accumulation of combustible materials, guarding, on-shift examinations relating to the slope belt, ventilation and equipment maintenance. The mine is on a 10-day spot inspection due to high methane liberation.

Editor’s note: A spreadsheet containing the entire results of October’s impact inspections can be found at <http://www.dol.gov/opa/media/press/msha/20101119-msha-press-release.pdf>.

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