

News Release



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MSHA publishes final rule on seals in underground coal mines *Standard goes beyond requirements outlined in MINER Act*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) published in the *Federal Register* today a final rule to increase protections for miners who work in underground coal mines with sealed-off abandoned areas. The final rule, which replaces the Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) that went into effect last May, increases the pounds per square inch (psi) pressure that seals must be able to withstand in the event of an explosion and adds other important safeguards to protect miners.

“This final rule goes beyond the requirements Congress set forth in the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response, or MINER, Act, which necessitates that mine seals be stronger than the 20 psi explosive pressure minimum established in 1992,” said Richard E. Stickler, acting assistant secretary for mine safety and health. “Under the new rule, operators must strengthen the design, construction, maintenance and repair of seals, as well as sample and control atmospheres behind certain seals. Seal strength must be designed to at least 50 psi.”

The final rule also has a number of other protections that will improve miner safety, including:

- Air sampling behind seals that are less than 120 psi and withdrawal of miners when a dangerous condition is discovered.
- Removal of potential ignition sources from sealed areas.
- The same three-tiered approach as in the ETS, which requires additional seal strength where sealed atmospheres are more dangerous.
- A certified supervisor for construction and repair of seals with senior management of the mine operator required to certify seal compliance with the MSHA-approved ventilation plan.
- Increased training for those involved in seal sampling and construction.
- Requirements for design certification of seals.
- Enhanced recordkeeping to ensure compliance.

Seal manufacturers and mine operators have six months to submit revised seal applications and ventilation plans, respectively, to comply with the final rule. Otherwise, because the final rule replaces the seals ETS from May 2007, it is immediately effective.

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