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## **STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON PASSAGE OF THE MINE IMPROVEMENT AND NEW EMERGENCY RESPONSE ACT**

Washington, D.C. –Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Ranking Member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee released the following statement on the Senate’s passage of the Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act.

“The tragedies at the Sago and Alma mines in West Virginia and the Darby mine in Kentucky could not have made the urgent need for these reforms clearer. Their fellow miners will be safer as a result of this legislation. It’s the most significant action by the Senate to improve mine safety in a generation, and it is gratifying that it passed with such strong bipartisan support. Under the MINER Act, miners will have more oxygen in case of an emergency and it will be more reliable.

Communication and tracking technology will be brought into the 21st century. Rescue teams will be able to respond more quickly, be better trained, and be more familiar with the mines they monitor so that rescues can be as prompt and effective as possible. Companies that ignore the safety of their employees will pay higher penalties.

Mining is one of the most dangerous jobs in the nation, and those who take these risks deserve to be as safe and healthy as possible. The bill is an overdue attempt to produce a much greater commitment to safety in the industry. I urge the House to move quickly to approve these much-needed reforms so they can be implemented as soon as possible.”

## **THE MINER ACT MAKES AMERICA’S MINES SAFER**

### **Miners will have more emergency oxygen to help them survive a disaster:**

- The bill requires each miner to have at least 2 hours of oxygen and stores of oxygen every 30 minutes along escape routes for miners trying to evacuate.
- It requires additional caches for trapped miners.
- Emergency supplies will be carefully monitored for reliability.

### **All mines will have flame resistant lifelines to guide miners evacuating in an emergency.**

**Seals for abandoned sections of mines will be stronger:** Within 18 months, the Secretary of Labor must issue higher standards for sealing off abandoned areas of mines to prevent dangerous explosions.

### **The Secretary will have new enforcement powers:**

- The bill sets substantial new minimum penalties for serious violations.
- It gives the Secretary clear authority to shut down mines for noncompliance with Department orders.

**All mines will have state-of-the-art two-way wireless communications and electronic tracking systems in place, as soon as technologically feasible, but not later than three years.**

**Mine rescue team response will be faster and better:**

- □□□□□ The bill requires rescue teams to be more familiar with the mines they monitor, be located closer, and have better training.
- □□□□□ It includes specific provisions for small mines that are realistic and provide a higher level of protection for miners than under current law.

**New liability rules will encourage companies to have mine rescue teams and miners to participate in them:** The bill clarifies that neither rescue team members nor their employers are liable for any injuries or deaths that occur as a result of rescue activities.

**Greater support is provided to boost advances in technology and train a new generation of skilled miners and safety inspectors:**

- □□□□□ The bill focuses NIOSH's mine safety activities and creates an interagency working group to facilitate the development of new technologies.
- □□□□□ It calls for expert study on belt-air and the flammability of belts, and for field tests of refuge chambers.
- □□□□□ It creates grant programs to improve safety training.
- □□□□□ It creates a scholarship program to increase the skilled workforce for mining operations and the inspector corps.

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