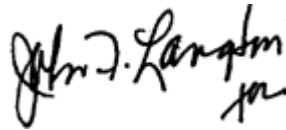


ISSUE DATE: 05/10/05

PROGRAM INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. P05-10

FROM: RAY McKINNEY
Administrator for
Coal Mine Safety and Health



SUBJECT: Coalbed Methane Wells

Who needs this information?

Underground coal mine operators, miner's representatives, coalbed methane (CBM) producers, independent contractors, state mining agencies, Coal Mine Safety and Health (CMS&H) enforcement personnel and other interested parties need this information.

What is the purpose of this bulletin?

The bulletin is intended to inform the mining industry that the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) has determined that CBM wells are subject to the ventilation plan and mapping requirements that apply to methane degas holes. These measures are necessary to protect underground coal miners from the potential hazards that may be associated with CBM wells that are near active coal mines. The ventilation plan and map requirements that affect CBM wells are:

30 CFR 75.371 (dd) The location of all horizontal degasification holes that are longer than 1,000 feet and the location of all vertical degasification holes;

30 CFR 75.371 (ee) If methane drainage systems are used, a detailed sketch of each system, including a description of safety precautions used with the systems;

30 CFR 75.372(b)(5) The locations of all known oil and gas wells and all known drill holes that penetrate the coalbed being mined;

30 CFR 75.372(b)(15) The locations of existing methane drainage systems; and

30 CFR 75.1200-1(d) All drill holes that penetrate the coalbed being mined.

These provisions apply to active and inactive coalbed methane wells, coalbed methane holes, degasification holes, degas holes, methane drainage systems and coalbed methane production systems. Coalbed methane is defined as methane that is produced from a coal seam and surrounding strata. There are no functional differences between degasification holes and CBM holes or methane drainage systems and CBM production systems. District manager approval is necessary before mining near or through CBM wells or installing a methane drainage system in an active mine.

What is the background for this bulletin?

Initially, methane in coal seams was extracted to reduce the quantity of potentially explosive methane gas that was liberated when the coal was mined. In 1974, the first commercial sale of CBM was made from a U.S. Bureau of Mines test shaft to a commercial natural gas pipeline in northern West Virginia. In 2003, CBM constituted approximately 8 percent of the domestic U.S. natural gas supply. Recent increases in natural gas prices have further accelerated the growth of this industry. The growing number of CBM production wells is resulting in more intersections with active underground coal mines. Unless adequate safety precautions are taken for these CBM wells, methane ignitions or explosions may occur when underground coal mines intersect these holes. MSHA has determined that these potential hazards can be adequately addressed through the ventilation plan approval process.

What is MSHA's authority for this Program Information Bulletin?

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977; 30 CFR Parts 75.371(dd) and (ee), 75.372(b)(5) and (b)(15), and 75.1200-1(d).

Is this Program Information Bulletin on the Internet?

This information bulletin may be viewed on the World Wide Web by accessing MSHA's home page (<http://www.msha.gov>), choosing "Compliance Info" and "Program Information Bulletins."

Who is the MSHA contact person for this bulletin?

Coal Mine Safety and Health
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Who will receive this bulletin?

MSHA PPM holders
Underground Mine Operators-Coal
Miner's Representatives-Coal
Independent Contractors
Special Interest Groups