

U.S. Department of Labor

Mine Safety and Health Administration  
1100 Wilson Boulevard  
Arlington, Virginia 22209-3939



May 31, 2007

Dear Underground Coal Mine Operator:

I am writing to you regarding a very significant issue relating to the health of miners in all underground coal mining operations. Newly released information from the NIOSH/MSHA Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Programs indicates that severe cases of coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP), commonly referred to as "black lung" disease, continue to occur among our nation's underground coal miners. Most troubling is the fact that these new cases include progressive massive fibrosis (PMF), the most disabling and potentially fatal form of CWP, among some of the younger miners in our industry.

As you know, inhalation of excessive levels of respirable coal mine dust causes black lung, a debilitating occupational lung disease, which can devastate a miner's quality of life, create a heavy burden on the victim and his or her family, and lead to premature death. More importantly, we know that black lung disease is preventable. The recent findings are certainly unexpected and indicate that preventive measures to protect the health of working miners have been ineffective. Given the availability of dust control technology to prevent miner exposure to excessive levels of respirable dust, the increase in black lung and PMF cases is unacceptable.

Over the next few months, MSHA will be initiating a lengthy national educational and training campaign on black lung disease awareness and prevention called, "Control the Dust/Prevent Black Lung." During this initiative, MSHA will distribute focused health education and training materials to mine operators, provide on-site inspector interaction with miners on various health-related topics, monitor the health portion of the Part 48 training conducted by mine operators, and conduct targeted workshops on controlling respirable coal mine dust in underground mines. We seek your assistance and active participation in this most important endeavor.

Specifically, we urge every coal mine operator nationwide to: 1) raise awareness on the health hazards associated with exposure to excessive dust levels; 2) maintain required controls stipulated in the approved ventilation plan on each production shift; 3) conduct adequate on-shift exams; 4) repair damaged controls immediately; 5) require miners to follow safe and healthy work practices; 6) prevent exposures to respirable dust; and 7) encourage miner participation in free medical screening programs.

With your cooperation, we can win the fight against this dreaded disease.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard E. Stickler".

Richard E. Stickler  
Assistant Secretary for  
Mine Safety and Health

Enclosures

You can now file your MSHA forms online at [www.MSHA.gov](http://www.MSHA.gov). It's easy, it's fast, and it saves you money!

## ***“Controlling Respirable Coal Mine Dust in Underground Mines”***

July 25, 2007

National Mine Health and Safety Academy

*Hosted by:* Mine Safety and Health Administration

*Co-sponsored by:* National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Inhalation of excessive levels of respirable coal mine dust causes coal workers' pneumoconiosis or black lung. Likewise, overexposure to respirable silica dust can lead to silicosis. These diseases are debilitating occupational lung diseases that can devastate a miner's quality of life, create a heavy burden on the victim and his or her family, and in some cases lead to premature death. While significant progress has been made since 1970 to reduce dust levels in our nation's coal mines, recent information published by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health indicates that miners continue to be at risk of developing coal workers' pneumoconiosis and silicosis. While there is no cure for these disabling lung diseases, they are preventable.

This one-day workshop, which is free to the general public, brings together a group of experts to share their knowledge and experience that will enable the attendees to better understand and prevent disabling occupational lung disease in coal miners. Armed with new knowledge and practical dust control tools and techniques, you will be able to make a difference. Encouraged to attend are mine managers and operational staff, mine workers, safety and health professionals, mine engineers, manufacturers and consultants, and anyone else with an interest in the prevention of black lung disease and silicosis in coal mines.

Topics to be covered in the workshop, scheduled to start at 8:30 am and last until 4:15 pm, will focus on continuous miner and roof bolter dust control techniques and include:

- ***Understanding and Detecting Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis and Silicosis***
- ***Face Ventilation Best Practices***
- ***Reducing Dust Generation and Optimum Suppression Techniques***
- ***Flooded Bed Dust Scrubbers***
- ***Roof Bolter Dust Control***
- ***Dust Control Parameters for Special Mining Situations***
- ***On-Shift Examination of Dust Control Parameters***

Speakers from J.H. Fletcher & Co., Joy Mining Machinery, MSHA and NIOSH will present information on the listed topics. If you have any questions and/or are interested in attending and would like to register, please contact George Niewiadomski at (202) 693-9513 or by e-mail: [niewiadomski.george@dol.gov](mailto:niewiadomski.george@dol.gov)

***Controlling Respirable Coal Mine Dust in Underground Mines***  
***Practical tools and techniques to prevent disabling lung disease in coal miners***

July 25, 2007

National Mine Health and Safety Academy

*Hosted by:* Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)

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**AGENDA**

- 8:30 am            **Welcome and Introductory Remarks**
- 9:00 am            **Understanding and Detecting Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis and Silicosis**  
*Dr. Edward L. Petsonk, NIOSH-DRDS*
- 10:00 am            **Break**
- Continuous Miner and Roof Bolter Dust Control Techniques***
- 10:15 am            **Face Ventilation Best Practices**  
*Ken Fields, Pittsburgh Safety and Health Technology Center, MSHA*
- 11:00 am            **Reducing Dust Generation and Optimum Suppression Techniques**  
*Jay Colinet and Jeff Listak, NIOSH-PRL*
- 12:00 am            **Lunch** *(on your own)*
- 1:15 pm             **Flooded Bed Dust Scrubbers**  
*Robert E. Schon, Joy Mining Machinery*
- 2:00 pm             **Roof Bolter Dust**  
*Dave Cooper and Fred Merlino, J.H. Fletcher & Co.*
- 2:45 pm             **Break**
- 3:00 pm             **Dust Control Parameters for Special Mining Situations**  
*Mike Dickerson, Coal Mine Safety and Health District 4, MSHA*
- 3:20 pm             **On-Shift Examination of Dust Control Parameters**  
*Paul Prince, Coal Mine Safety and Health District 4, MSHA*
- 3:40 pm             **Questions and Answers**
- 4:15 p.m.           **Closing Remarks**