

To the Mining Community:

The coal mining industry recently experienced five deaths at surface coal mines within a 41 day period. These five fatalities are more than half of the deaths at surface coal mines for 2011.

- On October 28, two miners were killed in a highwall failure in Kentucky.
- On November 2, a miner was seriously injured after his bulldozer rolled down a slope. He died on December 6.
- On December 3, a miner was killed when his bulldozer over-traveled the highwall and rolled.
- On December 7, one miner was killed when a highwall collapsed.

To remind operators, miners, and contractors to stay focused on preventing fatalities and injuries, the Mine Safety and Health Administration is distributing two surface coal mine fatality alerts: one for highwall safety and one for bulldozer safety. These provide critical information on best practices and preventative measures.

The attached Safety Alerts can be displayed at the mine to remind surface mine operators, miners, and contractors of the fatalities that occurred between October 28 and December 7, 2011, and the best practices to use to avoid similar fatalities in the future. This information can also be found on the MSHA web site at <http://www.msha.gov/alerts/SafetyFlyers/safetyflyers.htm>, along with printable posters.

Fatalities are preventable. Mining workplaces can and must be made safe for miners, and operators must ensure that safety procedures are always followed. The work environment must be evaluated before each shift and continually monitored throughout the shift. Many mines operate every shift of every day, year in and year out, without a fatality or a lost-time injury. It can be done. It requires constant focus, effort, and dedication.

Fatalities can be prevented by using effective **safety and health management programs** in your workplaces. **Workplace examinations** for hazards – on every shift, and throughout the shift – can identify and eliminate hazards that kill and injure miners. Effective and appropriate **training** will ensure that miners recognize and understand hazards and how to control or eliminate them. Mine operators and trainers need to train miners and mine supervisors on the hazardous conditions that lead to deaths and injuries and the measures to prevent and avoid them. Ground control plans and safe work procedures involving equipment and personnel working near highwalls should be constantly reviewed and assessed to assure miners are adequately protected.

The following additional **Best Practices** are recommended to prevent surface fatalities:

Highwalls

- **Inspect highwalls every shift for stability. Constantly look, listen, and evaluate highwall and pit conditions, especially after each rain, freeze, or thaw.**
- **Train all miners to recognize hazardous highwall conditions.**

- **Maintain adequate lighting to aid in examinations of highwalls and pits during conditions with limited visibility.**
- **Immediately communicate highwall hazards.**
- **Ensure appropriate action is taken to correct hazardous highwall or pit conditions.**
- **Ensure work or travel areas, mining systems, and equipment are a safe distance from the highwall.**

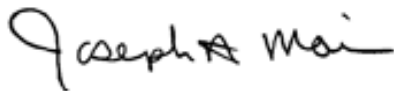
Bulldozers

- **Be familiar with the work environment. Before starting to grade an area, thoroughly inspect it and plan the safest way to move material and maneuver equipment.**
- **Install tilt gauges in dozers and do not exceed maximum operating angles.**
- **FULLY task train miners on the equipment they will operate.**
- **ALWAYS wear a seat belt!**

MSHA has taken a number of actions to identify mines with health and safety problems and initiated several outreach and enforcement initiatives, including “Rules to Live By,” a fatality prevention program spotlighting the safety and health standards most frequently cited during fatal accident investigations. We believe those actions, along with initiatives by the mining industry, will help prevent mining injuries and deaths

No miner should die on the job while trying to earn a paycheck. We must all work together to ensure that all miners can go home safe and healthy at the end of each shift.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph A. Main". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Joseph A. Main
Assistant Secretary of Labor
for Mine Safety and Health