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US Labor Department's MSHA releases first quarter mine fatality update

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration today released a first quarter summary of mining deaths across the country. Ten miners died in work-related accidents at the nation's mines during the first three months of 2012.

Six coal mining deaths occurred in the following categories: exploding vessels under pressure, drowning, handling materials, rib fall, machinery and electrical. An uncharacteristic trend identified over the quarter is that five of these fatalities – three of them involving mine supervisors – occurred on five consecutive weekends. Four mining deaths in the metal/nonmetal industry occurred from accidents involving powered haulage, a fall from an elevated walkway and, in two separate incidents, fall of material.

“Fatalities are preventable,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “Many mines operate every shift of every day, year in and year out, without a fatality or a lost-time injury.”

Main noted that fatalities can be prevented by using effective safety and health management programs in the workplace. “Workplace examinations for hazards – pre-shift and on-shift, every shift – can identify and eliminate hazards that kill and injure miners,” he said. “Providing effective and appropriate training will ensure that miners recognize and understand hazards and how to control or eliminate them.”

MSHA has taken a number of actions to identify mines with health and safety problems, and has initiated several outreach and enforcement initiatives, including “Rules to Live By,” a fatality prevention program highlighting safety and health standards most frequently cited during fatal accident investigations. Last month, MSHA circulated an accident prevention alert to the mining industry in the wake of four consecutive weekends of mine fatalities. The following weekend, a fifth fatality occurred.

An analysis of 2012's first quarter summary of mining fatalities is available on MSHA's website at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/summaries/summaries.asp>, along with best practices to help mining operations avoid such fatalities.

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