

From the Assistant Secretary's Desk
2012 Fatality Analysis

Our top priority is to reduce fatalities, injuries and illnesses in our nation's mines. As we reported last year, mining fatality and injury rates¹ were the lowest ever in history in 2011. Preliminary data show that we are continuing to move mine safety in the right direction with the fatality rates in 2012 for all mining reaching an all-time low for the second straight year. This means if the preliminary data for mining deaths for 2012 hold more miners than ever before are going home to their family and friends safe and healthy at the end of their shifts. We know it has taken the efforts of all of us in the mining industry to reach these new milestones. We also know that while mining deaths and injuries have reached historic lows, more action is needed by all to prevent mining injuries, illnesses and deaths.

Preliminary data for 2012 show that 36 miners died in work-related accidents at the nation's mines in 2012 - the second-lowest number of fatalities on record, one more than the 2009 historic low of 35. From January 1 to December 31, 2012, 19 coal miners and 17 metal/nonmetal miners died in work-related accidents.

Seven miners died in West Virginia, five in Kentucky, three each in New York and Alabama, two each in Montana and Florida, and one each in Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, North Carolina, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Virginia.

The leading cause of fatalities in the U.S. mining industry during 2012 was powered haulage, which claimed the lives of 10 miners. Other leading causes included machinery accidents, which killed six, slip or fall of person accidents, which also claimed six lives, and rib falls, which killed three miners.

Still, one death is too many and several issues of concern stand out among the deaths that occurred in 2012. Most notable was the number of supervisor deaths. Supervisors accounted for 9 fatalities out of a total of 36, or 25% of the total – a much higher percentage than in previous years. In September, MSHA issued an alert on the importance of supervisor training, noting the alarming number of fatalities in coal and metal in which mine owners or supervisors were killed while performing tasks for which they were not appropriately trained.

Pinning, crushing and striking accidents in underground coal mines continue to cause significant numbers of injuries and fatalities. From 1984 through 2012, 73 deaths occurred from these types of accidents – including 33 which were associated with continuous mining machines and which could have been prevented by a proximity detection system. In addition, MSHA estimates that using a proximity detection system could have prevented several nonfatal injuries associated

¹ In 2011, fatality and injury rates were the lowest ever recorded. The fatal injury rate for mining as a whole was .0114 per 200,000 hours worked, and the all-injury rate was 2.73 per 200,000 hours worked, down from .0234 and 2.81, respectively, in 2010. In the metal/nonmetal mining sector, the fatal injury rate was .0084 per 200,000 hours worked, and the all-injury rate was 2.28 per 200,000 hours worked, down from .0129 and 2.37, respectively, in 2010. In the coal mining sector, the fatal injury rate was .0156 per 200,000 hours worked, and the all-injury rate was 3.38 per 200,000 hours worked, down from .0384 and 3.43, respectively, in 2010.

with underground mining machines. In 2012, MSHA believes three deaths at underground coal mines could have been prevented by proximity detection systems. Some in the mining community have already invested in this technology. Alliance Resource Partners is installing proximity detection equipment on continuous mining machines. Consol Energy and Peabody Energy are working on the application of proximity detection protections to section mining equipment, and we look forward to hearing from other companies who may be following suit.

Training for miners at all levels of experience continues to be an issue. In 2012, 8 deaths involved miners with one year or less experience at the mine and 13 of the deaths involved miners with one year or less at the job or task. Three of the miners killed at metal and nonmetal mines had less than one year of experience at the mine. Five miners had less than one year of experience at the job or task they were performing. This is also an issue in coal. At coal mines, 5 miners who died had one year or less experience at the mine. Eight miners who were killed had one year or less experience at the job or task they were performing. Miners need effective and appropriate task training before they perform a new task.

MSHA has placed an analysis of the mining fatalities during 2012 on its website at <http://www.msha.gov/fatals/summaries/summaries.asp> along with best practices to help mining operations, miners and contractors avoid fatalities, and for trainers to include in miner training. Much more information on preventing mine injuries, illnesses and deaths is available on the MSHA web site for use by the mining community.

Mining deaths are preventable. The year that the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 passed, 273 miners died, and since that time, fatality numbers have steadily declined. In order to prevent mine deaths, operators must have in place effective safety and health management programs that are constantly evaluated, find-and-fix programs to identify and eliminate mine hazards, and training for all mining personnel.

MSHA has undertaken a number of measures to prevent mining deaths, injuries and illnesses: increased surveillance and strategic enforcement through impact inspections at mines with troubling compliance histories; enhanced pattern of violations actions; special initiatives such as "Rules to Live By," which focuses attention on the most common causes of mining deaths; and outreach efforts such as "Safety Pro in a Box," which provides guidance to the metal/nonmetal mining industry on best practices and compliance responsibilities.

MSHA also has issued two new final regulations that will contribute to reduced injuries and deaths in mining. The final rule for Examinations of Work Areas in Underground Coal Mines for Violations of Mandatory Health or Safety Standards became effective on August 6, 2012. The rule enhances miners' health and safety by requiring coal mine operators to identify and correct hazardous conditions and violations of nine health and safety standards that pose the greatest risk to miners, including the kinds of conditions that led to the explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine. The recent final rule on Pattern of Violations will go into effect on March 25, 2013 and will simplify the existing POV criteria, improve consistency in applying the POV criteria, and more effectively achieve the statutory intent. It will also encourage chronic violators to comply with the Mine Act and MSHA's safety and health standards.

It takes all of us in the mining community, working together, to improve mining health and safety. Actions by many in the mining industry have contributed to the overall mining safety improvements.

Miners deserve a safe and healthful workplace, and assurances they can return home safe and healthy each day.

To see data on mining fatalities by state in 2012 and as far back as 2001, visit <http://www.msha.gov/stats/charts/Allstates.pdf>.