

MSHA Tackles Rising Metal/Nonmetal Fatalities

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Only two months into 2015 and it has already been a busy year for the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). Last year, MSHA launched “Voice in the Workplace” as an initiative to prompt more involvement by miners in mine safety enforcement. On the heels of MSHA’s recent announcement that 2014 yielded the most discrimination complaints filed with the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission, MSHA chief Joe Main announced a refocusing of the agency’s attention and resources in 2015 on combating fatal accidents and serious injuries in response to the rising number of mining deaths at metal and nonmetal mines.

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Analysis of the Numbers

The spike in fatalities becomes clearer when looking at the numbers from year to year. In 2011 and 2012, the metal/nonmetal sector posted record low numbers of fatalities with 16 deaths suffered each year. In 2013, the metal/nonmetal sector suffered 22 deaths. The metal/nonmetal mining industry saw a second annual increase in fatalities in 2014 with 25 deaths. In stark contrast to this increasing trend, coal mining fatalities have declined over the same 4-year period with 16 deaths suffered in 2014—the lowest number of coal mining deaths in recorded history.

For added perspective, the overall fatality count for the mining industry in 2014 (41 deaths) is one less than the total count for 2013 and represents the fourth-lowest annual total on record. Stating that the

metal/nonmetal increase is “unacceptable,” Main told stakeholders that MSHA is “enlisting the support of the entire mining industry to help us refocus” on fatality prevention. To that end, MSHA has launched two new enforcement tools: “walk and talk” inspections and the “Rules to Live By” Calculator.

“Walk and Talk” Inspections

Calling upon its inspectors from both coal and metal/nonmetal and its training specialists from Educational Field Services (EFS), MSHA commenced walk and talk inspections at metal and nonmetal mines this month focused on mining occupations that have seen the most fatalities: supervisors, truck drivers, and contractors. Having analyzed the 37 metal/nonmetal deaths from the past 16 months, MSHA found 9 of the victims were supervisors, 7 were truck drivers, and 10 victims worked for contractors. Operators can expect MSHA inspectors and EFS personnel to talk to miners in these occupations during the walk and talk inspections. MSHA will also pay close attention to daily performance of workplace exams, pre-shift mobile equipment inspections, task training, proper use of personal protective equipment (e.g., seat belts, life vests, and fall protection), and lock out/tag out procedures.

“Rules to Live By” Calculator

Originally implemented in 2010, MSHA’s Rules to Live By initiative was designed to prevent fatalities in mining by identifying the most frequently cited standards that caused or contributed to fatal accidents and by enhancing enforcement of those priority standards. Nineteen priority standards apply to metal and nonmetal mines.

At an MSHA stakeholder meeting on February 25, 2015, MSHA released a new web tool called the Rules to Live By Calculator. Proclaimed an important part of MSHA’s strategy to address the spike in deaths at metal and nonmetal mines, the calculator allows mine operators and miners to determine a mine’s violation rate by showing the number of Rules to Live By violations relative to the number of inspection hours at that mine operation during a given time frame. The calculator also compares the mine’s citation and order rate with the national average for similar mine types over the most recent 12-month period. Mines that have violations exceeding the industry average may be subject to impact or spot inspections. Much like MSHA’s pattern of violations online tracking tool, the Rules to Live By Calculator allows mine operators to monitor their compliance in comparison to other mines. The Rules to Live By Calculator can be found [here](#).

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