

ISSUE DATE: 03/05/04

PROGRAM INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. P04-10

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SUBJECT: Preventing Injuries and Deaths of First Responders on Mine Sites

Scope

This Program Information Bulletin (PIB) applies to all Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) enforcement personnel, mine operators, independent contractors, police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel.

Purpose

The purpose of this bulletin is to alert enforcement personnel, the mining industry, miners' representatives, police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel of additional precautions that should be taken when arranging to provide emergency medical assistance and transportation of injured persons from a mine.

Information

Emergency response personnel such as police, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel often respond to mine emergencies. In these situations, emergency response personnel are subject to potential hazards of the mining environment. Though MSHA personnel attempt to ensure the safety and health of all persons at the mine, including first responders, MSHA believes that the hazards encountered during rescue and recovery efforts can be significantly reduced with appropriate hazard recognition training, knowledge of emergency and evacuation procedures, the use of self-rescuers, proper respiratory protection, and other instruction recommended by the District Manager.

Emergency response personnel routinely conduct case-specific risk assessments prior to entering any accident site. They are trained to identify and address potential hazards, along with the use of proper instruments and equipment to protect themselves and victims in a variety of hazardous circumstances. However, the mine environment can present unique hazards. Many potential hazards, such as explosive gases, confined spaces, and irrespirable atmospheres may be present in a mine, yet the emergency personnel may be unaware of the unique potential dangers present in the mine environment.

MSHA believes that emergency response personnel could increase their health and safety protection through enhanced training and preparation. MSHA recommends that emergency response personnel frequently communicate with mine operators to ensure familiarity with work site locations and to ensure that rescuers are provided with necessary training and equipment appropriate to each site. Providers of 911 communications should also be informed of such arrangements to ensure that trained personnel are called to mine emergencies. In addition, MSHA strongly encourages emergency response personnel to receive training in hazard recognition or be accompanied at all times by an experienced representative of the mine, or an MSHA inspector.

Background

Sections 75.1713-1, 77.1702, and 56/57.18014 require mine operators to make arrangements with appropriate services for emergency medical assistance and transportation of any injured persons at a mine. MSHA's report of investigation into the January 22, 2003, McElroy accident indicated that the first responders conducted a risk assessment and determined that they did not have the proper training to enter the shaft. The responders requested that mine rescue teams be brought to the shaft to recover the injured miners. After gathering additional information, the responders made a reasonable determination that the atmosphere was respirable and entered the shaft prior to the mine rescue team's arrival. They were accompanied by an employee of the shaft-sinking company who had traveled to the shaft bottom and returned to the surface following the explosion. The injured persons were recovered and the responders were unharmed. The emergency responders made their decision to enter the shaft based on their training in risk assessment; however, there are unique hazards associated with mine environments that they may not be aware of and these same personnel may have unknowingly put themselves at a greater risk. In that regard, prior to the time their services are required, the first responders should be provided training in hazard recognition and avoidance, emergency and evacuation procedures, the use of self-rescuer, respiratory devices as appropriate, and such other instruction as may be required by the District Manager based on mine specific circumstances and conditions.

MSHA through the National Mine Health and Safety Academy has developed a training course for first responders in mine hazard recognition. Contact Johnnie Tyler at the National Mine Health and Safety Academy at (304) 256-3541 for additional information regarding training courses or materials.

Authority

30 CFR Sections 75.1713-1, 77.1702, and 56/57.18014

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Internet Availability

This information bulletin may be viewed on the Internet by accessing MSHA's home page at <http://www.msha.gov>, choosing "Rules & Regs" and "Compliance Assistance Information."

Distribution

Program Policy Manual Holders

Special Interest Groups

Mine Operators

Independent Contractors

Miners Reps