



News Release

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MSHA announces results of September impact inspections

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s [Mine Safety and Health Administration](#) today announced that federal inspectors issued 192 citations, five orders and one safeguard during special impact inspections conducted at nine coal and four metal and nonmetal mines in September.

The monthly inspections, which began in force in April 2010 following the death of 29 miners in the explosion at the [Upper Big Branch Mine](#), involve mines that merit increased agency attention and enforcement due to their poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns, including evidence of a mine’s failure to control respirable dust and operator tactics to prevent MSHA from finding violations. The September 2014 impact inspections included the following examples:

MSHA began an impact inspection on Sept. 23 at Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc.’s Chino Mines Co. mine in Grant County, New Mexico. MSHA inspectors issued 38 citations to the mine operator for hazardous conditions, including unguarded belt conveyors that exposed miners to potential injury from entanglement; failure to provide handrails down a flight of steps exposing miners to slip, trip and fall hazards; and failure to barricade a tunnel to prevent injury from ground failure while miners were working and cutting in the area directly above the tunnel. Furthermore, a damaged pressure gauge on an acetylene gas cylinder created a potential fire or explosion hazard, and a wet floor in front of an electrical panel created a potential shock hazard.

MSHA also conducted an impact inspection at Solid Fuel Inc.’s Watson Branch Mine in Claiborne County, Tennessee, during the first shift on Sept. 24. Enforcement personnel traveled underground and immediately monitored the communications systems to prevent advance notification of the inspection. They entered the mine by walking in the belt conveyor entry to the mining section and issued 25 citations, one order and one safeguard on the surface area of the mine, the belt conveyors and the continuous mining machine. This was the first impact inspection at this mine.

Inspectors issued an [unwarrantable failure order](#) for combustible material accumulations in the form of loose coal, coal fines and coal dust in the section for a distance of 180 feet. In addition, another unwarrantable failure citation was issued for combustible material accumulations at eight locations along and under a section of conveyor belt for a distance of approximately 720 feet. Accumulations were extensive and obvious.

Pre-shift and on-shift examinations were conducted in these areas; however, inspectors found that accumulations had been rock dusted without the areas being cleaned and little to no rock dust had been applied to the roof. These accumulations, along with others found throughout the mine, created fire and explosion hazards to miners. Rock dust is pulverized limestone used to reduce the explosion potential of coal dust and other dust generated during mining operations.

The mine operator also was cited because miners could not text with their communications system as required by the post-accident portion of the mine’s approved [emergency response plan](#). Only one of the text devices was operable, and just four of the eight miners were trained on how to use text devices. Inspectors found that the U.S. Department of Labor news materials are accessible at <http://www.dol.gov>. The department’s [Reasonable Accommodation Resource Center](#) converts departmental information and documents into alternative formats, which include Braille and large print. For alternative format requests, please contact the department at (202) 693-7828 (voice) or (800) 877-8339 (federal relay).

lifeline, which is a durable, rope-like or rigid flame-resistant material that miners use to guide them out of the mine in the event of an emergency, and other equipment, such as the communication and tracking system's backup battery, along with a gas detector, were not properly maintained.

Other safety violations found included damaged top rollers on the conveyor belt, inoperative emergency parking brakes on the scoop, uninsulated trailing cable on the continuous mining machine, inadequate guarding on the belt drive and loading point tail roller, and failure to record hazardous conditions during the pre-shift examination of the continuous mining machine MMU and conveyor belt.

Since April 2010, MSHA has conducted 823 impact inspections and issued 13,140 citations, 1,194 orders and 55 safeguards.

Editor's Note: MSHA's [Monthly Impact Inspection List](#) for September 2014 is available online.

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