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PROGRAM INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. P10-11

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SUBJECT: Maintaining Face Ventilation Control Devices

Scope

This Program Information Bulletin (PIB) applies to underground coal mine operators, miners' representatives, independent contractors, Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) enforcement personnel and other interested parties.

Purpose

The purpose of this Program Information Bulletin (PIB) is to provide important information regarding the required maintenance of face ventilation control devices.

Information

Face ventilation controls are a critical feature for providing underground coal miners with reliable ventilation. Failure to maintain controls or make prompt repairs to restore ventilation places miners' safety and health at risk due to an increased risk of a methane ignition and elevated respirable dust. Moreover, most miners on a working section do not have a means of measuring air quantities. Miners, however, can determine when ventilation controls are damaged substantially and when the controls are likely to adversely affect the air quantity.

MSHA's standard at 30 C.F.R. § 75.330 (a) requires brattice cloth, ventilation tubing, and other face ventilation control devices to be made of flame-resistant material approved by MSHA. In addition, 30 C.F.R. § 75.330(b)(1) requires that face ventilation control devices be used to provide ventilation at each working face from which coal is being cut, mined, drilled for blasting, or loaded, and at other working faces as specified in the mine's approved ventilation plan, such as in locations where roof bolting is being conducted. Mine operators must ensure that face ventilation devices are used to effectively direct air where miners are working to dilute, render harmless, and to carry away flammable, explosive, noxious, and harmful gases, dusts, smoke, and fumes from areas where miners work. If MSHA finds evidence that the face ventilation devices are not used, the Agency will take prompt enforcement action to protect miners.

Section 75.330(b)(2) requires ventilation control devices to be maintained at a distance not to exceed 10 feet from the area of deepest penetration to which any portion of the face has been advanced unless an alternative distance is specified in an approved ventilation plan. The alternative distance requirement must be effective in maintaining concentrations of respirable dust, methane, and other harmful gases at safe levels, as required by the applicable MSHA standards.

Under 30 C.F.R § 75.330(c), when line brattice or any other face ventilation control device is damaged to an extent that ventilation of the working face is inadequate, production activities in the working place are required to cease until necessary repairs are made and adequate ventilation is restored. MSHA expects mine operators to be diligent and prompt in adequately repairing damaged face ventilation control devices. MSHA emphasizes to the mining industry that if these devices become damaged or cannot adequately ventilate a face, potentially dangerous conditions for miners can result. Therefore, mine operators must cease mining operations in the working place until appropriate repairs are made. MSHA intends to continue to obtain air quantity measurements prior to issuing citations and orders under MSHA standards and the Mine Act.

MSHA maintains an anonymous hotline to report hazardous conditions. The phone number is **1-800-746-1553**. Persons may also report hazardous conditions to their MSHA District office. MSHA will promptly investigate any report of a hazardous condition at a mine.

Background

On April 21, 2010, MSHA launched inspections at 57 coal mines whose enforcement history indicated a significant number of violations related to methane accumulations, ventilation practices, rock dusting, and mine examinations. These impact inspections followed the April 5, 2010, explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, West Virginia, and focused attention on mine ventilation, rock dusting, methane monitoring, and mine examinations.

In addition, on May 24, 2010, the House Education and Labor Committee conducted a hearing on the Upper Big Branch explosion. The Committee heard testimony from deceased miners' families. The testimony addressed issues regarding safety conditions in existence prior to the explosion including inadequate ventilation, intentional changes to ventilation systems, high levels of methane, excessive coal float dust, "bridging out" methane monitors on mining equipment, advance notice of MSHA inspections, and retaliation for miners who raised safety and health issues.

This PIB emphasizes that MSHA intends for mine operators to fully comply with the Mine Act and MSHA's regulatory requirements.

Authority

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, as amended, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq.; and 30 C.F.R. § 75.330.

Availability

This PIB may be viewed on the Internet by accessing the MSHA home page (www.msha.gov) choosing "Compliance Info" and "Program Information Bulletins."

Issuing Office and Contact Persons

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