

## Safety Milestones Set in Mining Sector in 2015

February 18, 2016

The Metal/Non-Metal (M/NM) sector of the U.S. mining industry achieved two first-ever milestones last year, not only by working without a fatality for 133 consecutive days — about 4.5 months — but also by doing so during October, a month which had never before been fatality-free in the M/NM sector.

The good news, presented at an M/NM stakeholders' meeting in January, was delivered by Mine Safety and Health Administration lead Joe Main. Main noted that the multi-month accomplishment in 2015 ran from August 4 through December 14. The previous fatality-free period was 82 days that ended on January 9, 2010, he said.

The M/NM sector experienced 17 fatalities during 2015, down from 29 deaths the previous year, ending a 23-month upswing in mining deaths that began in October 2013. From October 2013 until last August 3, 52 M/NM workers died on the job, an average of more than two per month. Contract workers made up about 30% of these fatalities. Losses were highest among miners/laborers (30%), truck drivers (26%), and supervisors (20%).

MSHA launched fatality prevention initiatives in June 2014, February 2015, and August 2015. Each initiative involved stepped-up enforcement, education, and outreach. Education and outreach were accomplished using enforcement officers, who discussed recent fatalities and best safety practices with miners in “walk-and-talk” sessions during inspection visits. In addition, personnel from MSHA’s Educational Field and Small Mine Services unit visited thousands of M/NM mines to pass out safety information and provide compliance assistance.

Enforcement personnel helped with inspections focused on what MSHA believed contributed to the fatalities, such as inadequate task training or shortcomings in workplace examinations. The agency expanded its M/NM inspectorate to conduct more inspections by reassigning officers from its coal inspectorate.

MSHA’s August fatality prevention initiative was especially noteworthy. The agency made a vigorous appeal for assistance from key stakeholders, such as unions and mining trade associations.

MSHA has said it would “continue what works” in 2016 and urged stakeholders to work together on fatality prevention. The agency also called on others to sign up as supporters of MSHA’s safety initiatives.

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