



**pennsylvania**

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

# **MINE FAMILIES FIRST**

## **Response and Communications Implementation Plan**

**Developed by the BUREAU OF MINE SAFETY  
with assistance from the Mine Families First Response  
and Communications Advisory Council**

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# Mine Families First Response and Communications Implementation Plan

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**SUBJECT: Pennsylvania Mine Families First Act- 52 P.S. §§1430.1 – 1430.7**

**Purpose:**

On October 4, 2007, Governor Ed Rendell signed into law the ‘Mine Families First Act.’ The purpose of this Act is to provide assistance to the family members of persons who are trapped or awaiting rescue during an underground mine emergency. The Act assigns responsibilities to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). These duties include the development of a Mine Families First Program as part of the Mine Emergency Response Program to ensure two-way communication between those persons in command of a mine emergency operation and the affected families, through the mine family first liaison staff.

This plan assigns responsibilities to the mine operator in addition to outlining the Commonwealth’s response in a mine emergency involving miners who are trapped or awaiting rescue. It is the basic document for organizations in the Commonwealth given responsibilities under this plan to develop supporting plans and establish procedures.

For the purpose of this plan, a mine emergency is defined as an event in which a miner or miners are trapped or awaiting rescue.

**Policy Statement:**

It is the policy of the Commonwealth to treat the families of miners who are trapped or awaiting rescue during a mine emergency with the dignity and respect they deserve. In addition, the policy is to ensure families are provided updated information on rescue efforts before the public or the media. Further, the policy is to ensure that family needs and questions are addressed during the mine emergency. The Commonwealth recognizes that all disasters start at the local level and initial response starts there as well. Local support systems should be utilized to support mine families, escalating to the state and then federal resources, only as necessary.

The mine operator continues to have the primary responsibility to the miners and their families affected by a mine emergency. The mine operator is primarily responsible for family notification and all aspects of family logistical support. Although the mine operator’s responsibilities have not changed, the “Mine Families First Act” places the mine operator, as well as other support organizations, in a more collaborative relationship with families.

## **General Discussion of Underground Mine Emergencies:**

The initial response to most disasters and emergencies in the Commonwealth is normally handled by local responders, dispatched by county 9-1-1. If it appears that the incident will grow beyond the capabilities of the locality, or if more than one local municipality will be involved in response, the county Emergency Management Agency (EMA) will assist with coordination of the efforts. If local resources become overwhelmed, the county will provide supplemental assistance. If county resources are not adequate, the county EMA will turn to other counties, the Regional Task Forces, or the state for assistance.

The mine operator, the Commonwealth, and the U.S. Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) work cooperatively during mine emergencies. This cooperation includes the establishment of an incident command center to oversee the rescue and recovery operations during a mine emergency. The incident command center is made up of the mine operator, appropriate state agencies, MSHA, and, if applicable, miners' representative(s). Both federal and state laws place the responsibility of the rescue and recovery upon the mine operator. The operator must have plans in place before an emergency that are approved by the Commonwealth and the federal government. The operator must also develop specific action plans during an emergency that must be approved by the incident command center.

## **STATE RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Family First Liaison:**

The DEP shall designate trained staff to serve as mine families first liaisons for each mine emergency where miners are trapped or awaiting rescue. The DEP shall coordinate the mine families first liaison program with state and federal agencies to ensure consistency with overall emergency response procedures and protocols.

The mine families' first liaison shall at a minimum:

1. Coordinate with the mine operator's designated family representative and designated federal family liaison.
2. Provide miners' families with briefings on the progress of mine emergency response operations in a timely and effective manner.
3. Receive and act on comments, concerns and needs of the miners' families during and immediately after the response to the mine emergency.
4. Coordinate with the appropriate social service and disaster aid agencies and organizations to provide assistance needed by mine families.
5. Ensure information regarding the mine emergency response is communicated to miners' families first before information is released to the public or media.
6. Ensure the wishes of the miners' families are honored with respect to the granting of interviews and access by the news media.

7. Prepare an after-action report (AAR) within 30 days after a mine emergency to be submitted to the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council through DEP.

**Action Plan:**

The DEP will develop a staff of qualified personnel who will be prepared to serve as family liaisons in the event of a mine emergency where miners are trapped or awaiting rescue. The selected staff will have appropriate technical expertise, as well as skills to facilitate disaster mental health support.

Upon notification of a possible mine emergency where miners are trapped or awaiting rescue, the DEP will promptly assign a family liaison. The assigned family liaison will travel to the site as soon as possible. The liaison will be briefed by the DEP official in charge of emergency activities in order to establish communication with the miners' families. The DEP will develop a method of identifying individuals who may access the miners' families' secured location. At the conclusion of the mine emergency, the family liaison will provide family members with DEP contact information.

**Training Program:**

The DEP shall develop a training program for mine families' first liaisons to provide a basic level of competency in handling emergency situations. The training shall include, at a minimum, effective communication techniques, understanding the psychological factors experienced by miners' families during mine emergency situations, skills necessary to coordinate mental health support and referrals, confidentiality standards, after-action report development, and DEP's role in the management of an emergency situation. Training sessions shall be scheduled on a regular basis, at least annually, to ensure that all participants fully understand their role as family liaisons in mine emergencies.

**MINE OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

Each underground mining operation in the Commonwealth shall submit a plan to DEP for approval that details what steps will be taken to communicate with families of miners involved in a mine emergency where miners are trapped or awaiting rescue. The Bureau of Mine Safety (BMS) may assist in the development of the plan if requested by the mine operator.

The operator's Mine Families' First Response and Communication Plan shall at a minimum contain:

1. Designation of an employee or agent who can be contacted by the DEP family liaison.

2. Procedures for the reasonable and timely notification of the family member or alternate designated by the mine employee in the event of a mine emergency, as outlined in the mine operator's site-specific Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan.
3. Designation of a physical location for mine families to gather to obtain information about the mine emergency and rescue operation. Further, to provide transportation to that location, if necessary, as outlined in the mine operator's site-specific Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan.
4. Security provisions to assure the privacy of mine families at the location designated for mine emergency briefings for families, as outlined in the mine operator's site-specific Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan.
5. Procedures to ensure mine families are briefed regularly, prior to the news media, about the progress of the mine emergency response. The briefings will be a coordinated effort by the mine operator, state and federal agencies, and representatives of the miners, if applicable.
6. Procedures and a process for involving the participation of not-for-profit and public social service organizations to provide counseling and other social services mine families may need during a mine emergency, as outlined in the mine operator's site-specific Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan.
7. Procedures and a process for notification and, if needed, transportation of miner families to medical facilities where miners extricated from mines are given follow-up medical care, as outlined in the mine operator's site-specific Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan.