

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
16th Floor Delaware Room
May 28, 2008

The first meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on May 28 in the 16th Floor Delaware Room of the Rachel Carson State Office Building in Harrisburg. The meeting began at 10:05 a.m.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, NIOSH
Judith D. Shabbick, SMRT
Rickie Polke, UMWA, At-Large Member - House
Pam Weeks, PEMA
Mike Rothermel, IMA, At-Large Member - Senate
George Ellis, PCA (alternate for Thomas Hoffman)

Others Present:

Kathleen McGinty, DEP Secretary (present for opening remarks)
Ron Bowersox, UMWA
Jane Bishop, DPW
John Stefanko, DEP-MRM
Tom Rathbun, DEP-OPC
Joseph Sbaffoni, DEP-BMS
Jeff Stanchek, DEP-BMS
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS

DEP Secretary Kathleen McGinty introduced herself and gave a brief overview of the Department. She then asked for introductions around the room, noted the extraordinary skills that all members bring to the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council, and, on behalf of the Governor and legislative leaders, extended her gratitude to all participants. Secretary McGinty outlined three items of discussion for this first meeting:

1. Administration and organization of the council, including the election of a chairperson
2. Development and adoption of bylaws
3. Work on the Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan

Secretary McGinty announced her departure and introduced Bureau of Mine Safety Director Joseph Sbaffoni. At that time Director Sbaffoni gave a brief summary of House Bill 483 and the requirements.

He reiterated that the purpose of this advisory council was to assist the Department in developing the initial mine families first response and communication plan. He explained that the Department is not represented on the advisory council but would provide administrative and technical support when requested.

George Ellis, Pennsylvania Coal Association, requested a copy of the “Mine Emergency Response Program” as stated in the Definition section of House Bill 483. Director Scaffoni explained that this definition refers to the authorities in the Acts mentioned in that section. Mr. Scaffoni also stated that if a mine emergency involving entrapment would occur, the Quecreek model would be followed. The Quecreek model will also be used to address family members’ needs until the Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan is finalized. Samples of mine operators’ MSHA-approved emergency response plans will be provided to the advisory council for their information.

Election of Chairperson

Since the full seven-council members were not present, Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler made a motion to wait until the next meeting to elect a chairperson. Mike Rothermel seconded the motion and all agreed. This will be the first agenda item for the next meeting.

Development of By-Laws

The advisory council reviewed the draft by-laws that were provided. After a few minor changes, a motion was made by Rickie Polke and seconded by Pam Weeks to accept these changes and adopt the revised by-laws. Motion carried 6 to 0.

Review of the Draft Mine Families First Response and Communications Plan

The council began the process of providing recommendations to the DEP for the initial plan. MSHA’s IG 110 “Responding to a Mine Emergency” was distributed for reference. MSHA’s MINER Act and Program Policy Letter will be provided to the members. DEP Legal Counsel and certain council members agreed to perform a comparison of House Bill 483 and the MINER Act to determine if the advisory council can recommend a plan similar to MSHA’s procedure to promote consistency.

Pam Weeks, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, agreed to look at specific procedures from other organizations on how to handle families in a disaster situation.

The next meeting is scheduled for July 10 at 10 a.m. in the Fayette County Health Center in Uniontown.