

**MINUTES**  
**Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council**  
**Marion Center, PA**  
**September 10, 2014**

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council (MFFRCAC) was held on September 10 at 1:28 p.m. in the Marion Center Mine Rescue and Training Facility in Home, PA.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler  
Judith Shabbick, Special Medical Response Team (SMRT)  
John Kline, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)  
John Pippy, Pennsylvania Coal Alliance (PCA)

Others Present:

Joseph Sbaffoni, DEP-BMS  
Laura Edinger, DEP-Policy Office  
Jeffrey Stanchek, DEP-BMS  
Dustin Mowery, DEP-BMS  
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS

Previous chairman, Tom Hoffman, resigned on June 1, 2014, and was recently replaced on August 11, 2014, by Pennsylvania Coal Alliance representative John Pippy. Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler agreed to chair the meeting until elections were held during this meeting and a new chairperson was nominated. At her request, introductions were made around the room. Members not in attendance were Pamela Weeks (PEMA), Ed Rinda (House of Representatives), and Alfred Brown (Senate).

Minutes from the October 31, 2013, meeting held in Uniontown, PA, were reviewed.

**A motion was made by John Pippy and seconded by John Kline to accept the minutes as submitted, and all members accepted the motion.**

**Bureau of Mine Safety Report of Activities:**

Joe Sbaffoni stated that the Bureau of Mine Safety completed the tasks outlined at the October meeting. The Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual was updated and distributed to the mining community in April 2014, along with a memo explaining the importance of mental health issues that accompany mine disasters.

Mine family liaison training and a mini-MERD (mine emergency response development) was also held prior to this meeting for interested parties from coal companies, family liaisons, and the Department's Community Relations Coordinators (CRCs).

The Mine Families First Reference Manual is formally updated periodically but changes occur frequently. Jeff Stancheck reported it will be updated again in January 2015. It was pointed out that, due to frequent personnel changes, callers should ask for the coordinator for each county rather than the name listed in the manual.

There was discussion on the previous training offered by the Federal National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) held at the MSHA Academy in Beckley and the relevance to coal mining disasters. The NTSB training focuses on disasters affecting people from all over the world, whereas mining disasters affect small close-knit communities that live together following the event. Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler felt that the MERD that was conducted by the Bureau of Mine Safety was more beneficial to the mining industry.

Bureau Director Joseph Scaffoni stated that there have been no fatalities in Pennsylvania mines in over 5 years, the last being in June 2009. Part of the responsibilities of the MFFRCAC is to have an annual meeting. Given that there have been fewer issues to discuss, meeting in addition to the annual meeting have not been scheduled.

#### *Mental Health Issues in a Mine Disaster:*

Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler and Dr. Mark Lepore both conducted presentations at the Mine Families First Training. The mental health issues and need for local intervention was addressed in the letter sent to the industry in April.

Judith Shabbick reminded the council that the previous chairman, Tom Hoffman, had suggested incorporating a mental health aspect into the MERD. Discussion took place on incorporating mental health (behavioral health) into the state mine rescue competition next year.

Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler suggested writing a letter to Joe Main, MSHA, sharing what we have done in Pennsylvania. Jeff Stancheck said he extended an invitation for the Family Liaison MERD to MSHA Districts 2 and 3, but there was no response, nor did they send a representative to attend.

#### *New Business:*

##### *Vacancies*

The Mine Families First Act requires representatives from the mine owners, mine labor unions, local emergency response professionals, mental health professionals, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, and two at-large members from the general public appointed by the Senate and House of Representatives, but there are current vacancies that are not being filled.

John Pippy suggested that the council as a group send a letter to appointing officials stating the need for their representatives and importance of submitting nominees to fill the vacancies. It was agreed that the new chairperson would draft a letter and work with John Pippy to send to the appropriate parties. The letter would be sent by the MFFRCAC. John Kline mentioned that his alternate Rich Fink showed interest in representing the House.

#### *How the MFFRCAC Advisory Council can support Family Liaisons*

Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler stated that the Mine Families First Training was a good start, the information provided and the MERD were well-received. She would like to see this training

continue. Judith Shabbick stated that the MFFRCAC was initially formed to advise and make recommendations. The council was not formed to help the family liaisons in the field, but will critique any incident and make recommendations to the Department. This would be done after a disaster by reviewing a report and conducting interviews after the fact.

Discussion took place on the role of the family liaison and observation. Dr. Kathleen Kowalski Trakofler stated that observation is essential to understand interaction. However, Judith Shabbick stated a concern with being an observer and liaison. Further discussion on this topic was tabled.

Election of Chairperson

Two candidates had agreed previously to be considered to chair the council, John Kline and Judith Shabbick. John Kline declined his nomination at the meeting.

**John Kline made a motion for Judith Shabbick to serve as Chairman, John Pippy seconded the motion, and all members accepted the motion.**

Four voting members were in attendance, therefore a quorum was present. Judith Shabbick graciously accepted to chair the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council.

Next Meeting Date and Location:

The Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council would like to try to have next year's meeting in conjunction with the PEMA conference next fall.

**A motion was made by John Pippy and seconded by Judith Shabbick to adjourn meeting at 2:42 p.m.**