

BRIEFLY...

Highlights of Report Number: 05-08-001-06-001, *Underground Coal Mine Inspection Mandate Not Fulfilled Due to Resource Limitations and Lack of Management Emphasis*, to the Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health, dated November 16, 2007.

WHY READ THE REPORT

The Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 (Mine Act) requires the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) to inspect underground coal mines in their entirety at least four times per year to safeguard miners. Missed or incomplete inspections potentially place miners at risk. It is, therefore, important that all required inspections are performed and all critical inspection activities are completed during those inspections. The August 2007 fatalities at the Crandall Canyon Mine in Utah underscore the need to continuously improve processes that minimize safety and health risks in underground coal mines.

WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a performance audit of MSHA's underground coal mine inspection process to determine whether MSHA ensured that (1) all underground coal mines received the required regular safety and health inspections and (2) all critical inspection activities required during the inspections were completed. Subsequent to the fatalities at Crandall Canyon, we added the recent safety and health inspections at that mine to our audit scope.

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology, and full agency response, go to:

<http://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2008/05-08-001-06-001.pdf>

November 2007

WHAT OIG FOUND

MSHA's Office of Coal Mine Safety and Health (CMS&H) did not perform all required inspections at 107, or 15 percent, of the Nation's 731 underground coal mines in Fiscal Year 2006. This occurred because of decreasing inspection resources and CMS&H management not placing adequate emphasis on ensuring the inspections were completed.

CMS&H also could not provide adequate assurance that some critical inspection activities required by MSHA policy were performed during regular safety and health inspections because 15 percent of the critical inspection activities we reviewed were not documented. This occurred because CMS&H did not require inspectors to document all critical inspection activities performed and Field Office supervisors to document their conclusions regarding the thoroughness of the overall inspections.

For the Crandall Canyon Mine, we found that all seven required regular safety and health inspections were performed during FY 2006 and FY 2007. However, CMS&H could not provide adequate assurance that all critical activities were performed during these inspections. Further, one inspection was found to be incomplete and unsatisfactory by the Field Office supervisor, one lacked required documentation, and one contained misdated documents for critical inspection activities, which MSHA could not explain.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

We made seven recommendations to the Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health. Key recommendations include ensuring:

- inspection resources are commensurate with mining activity;
- CMS&H document all critical inspection activities as performed or not applicable;
- Field Office supervisors certify inspections are thorough and complete; and
- inspection documentation and supervisory oversight are reviewed as part of CMS&H's Accountability Program.

MSHA has initiated or planned corrective action to address 5 of our 7 recommendations. MSHA did not agree to implement corrective action for 2 recommendations.