

May 4, 2004

## **Safety Tips for the Field**

Spring is here and the fieldwork season is upon us. It is time for all of us who conduct fieldwork to be acutely aware of the potential hazards involved. Surface mines and fieldwork present a series of unique safety risks of which you should be aware. Whether you are neophyte or a veteran, it is good practice to be acquainted with surface mine safety procedures. Here are some suggestions that will help you work safely:

- The first thing you should do when entering a mine site, after donning your hard hat and steel toed boots, is to stop at the office and let the foreman know that you are on site. Also let the foreman know what parts of the site you intend to visit and how long you will be there.
- If this is your first visit to this mine in the past year, you will need to receive MSHA Mine Safety Hazard Training specific for the site you are visiting.
- Ask if blasting will be occurring while you are there. If yes, make sure you know and understand the pre- and post-blasting signals, where the blasting will be located and the approximate time of the shot. Be aware of potential for flyrock and avoid being in areas that could receive flyrock. If you have a cell phone or a two-way radio, be sure to turn them off – they can cause premature detonations.
- Be careful entering areas that were recently blasted. The ground can be unstable and there can be unexploded materials exposed.
- Be sure you understand the on-site traffic patterns. It is common on surface mines to drive on the left side of the road! There usually are signs at the crossover point, but not always.
- Park where you can be clearly seen. Never park directly behind or in a blind spot of any heavy equipment. The visibility of this equipment is limited and the operator may not be able to see you until it is too late.



- Give heavy equipment the right-of-way. They cannot maneuver or stop nearly as well as you can.
- Be cautious on mine haul roads and aware that they are not like conventional streets and highways. Stopping and steering is not the same. Haul roads are commonly made of gravel and/or dirt or mud, therefore stopping distances will be increased more than you are accustomed. Stay within the posted speed limits.
- Never run over hoses, cables, or wires unless specifically told you can do so.
- If you cannot avoid hoses, cables, and wires, step over and not on them. Even an invisible pinhole in a high tension power line (e.g., dragline cable) can electrocute you!
- When walking and working around heavy equipment, make sure the operator knows you are there and can see you. Make sure that you make eye contact with him/her or you talk with him/her. Do not approach or climb on equipment unless the operator motions or tell you to do so.
- When walking around the site be cognizant where the highwall is located. Do not approach too closely to the highwall from above or below. Highwalls by their nature are unstable.
- Be careful in walking close to treatment or sedimentation ponds. The banks tend to be steep, slippery and/or soft. Accidental sliding or falling into a pond is not out of the question. Carrying field equipment and wearing heavy boots is not conducive to swimming!
- Chemicals used for water treatment (e.g., anhydrous ammonia, sodium hydroxide (caustic soda), calcium oxide, hydrated lime, sodium carbonate, and other chemicals) are strong bases and can cause burns to the skin and eyes. Be aware of what chemicals are being used and where the treatment is taking place. It is a good practice to have some extra water available in case the exposed area needs to be flushed clean.



- Be cautious when driving on steep sloped areas. Most four wheel drive field vehicles have a high center of gravity and can roll over more easily than your more familiar personal motor vehicle. Additionally, unseen soft spots and holes in unfamiliar terrain can cause one wheel to suddenly drop and trigger a rollover.
- When performing fieldwork in warm weather, be cautious of poisonous snakes, spiders, ticks, mosquitoes and other biting and stinging critters. Keep an eye out for snakes out sunning themselves on these warm spring mornings. Ticks are known to carry Lyme Disease and mosquitoes can carry the West Nile Virus. It is a good idea to use bug repellent and carry it in your field kit or vehicle. You should tuck the bottom of your pants into your socks and wear long sleeve shirts. Check your body for ticks when you return from the field.
- For at least two reasons, it is a good practice to let the mine foreman know when you are leaving. First, they will not have to look for you at the end of the day. Second, you are less likely to get locked in the site if they know you will notify them of your departure.

**Safety Tip: While working in the field you should practice field safety. This will reduce your chances of accidents and injuries. Remember you are responsible for your own safety and especially when you are conducting field activities.**

