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WASHINGTON, D.C.
WWW.OSMRE.GOV

December 12, 2014
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) Announces Director's Decision to Pursue Revised Rule on Blasting Operations at Coal Mines in the United States

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In response to an April 2014 petition from Wildearth Guardians, the [Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement](http://www.osmre.gov) (OSMRE) announced today the decision of Director Joseph Pizarchik to pursue a revision of the Bureau's rules with regard to blasting operations at coal mines in the United States.

The group asked OSMRE to consider a rule to prohibit the production of visible nitrogen oxide during blasting operations for coal mining activities. Typically, released nitrogen oxide is evident by an orange-tinted cloud of gas if the blasting charges are not properly detonated. The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) already prohibits blasting that would harm people or property, but the rules are not as clear as they could be with respect to toxic gases.

"After careful consideration, I have decided OSMRE must clarify its rules to prevent harm to people and property during blasting operations," said [Director Pizarchik](#). "There are many responsible operators and regulators who understand they must and do blast in a manner that protects people."

"Unfortunately, not everyone understands their legal obligations, or they are willing to take unnecessary risks," he added. "I have directed our specialists to craft a rule that makes it clear to all that the prevention of harm to people and property from toxic gases is covered by the law."

In July 2014, OSMRE solicited and accepted public comment on the potential rule for 60 days. After reviewing the comments, Director Pizarchik decided it was appropriate to move forward with a proposed rulemaking. OSMRE will clarify the current regulations to define "blast area," and make it clear that blasters must recognize and protect the public from toxic gases that result from explosive operations at coal mines. The bureau will publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at a later date.

OSMRE carries out the requirements of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 in cooperation with states and tribes. OSMRE's objectives are to ensure that coal mining activities are conducted in a manner that protects citizens and the environment during mining, to ensure that the land is restored to beneficial use after mining, and to mitigate the effects of past mining by aggressively pursuing reclamation of abandoned coal mines.

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