

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
Home, PA
April 28, 2011

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on April 28 at the Marion Center Mine Rescue and Training Facility in Home, PA. The meeting began at 10:16 a.m.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Chairperson Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, NIOSH
Thomas Hoffman, PCA
John Kline, UMWA
Judith Shabbick, SMRT
Pam Weeks, PEMA (via phone)

Others Present:

Richard Fink, UMWA (Alternate for John Kline)
Chris Anderson, SMRT (Alternate for Judith Shabbick)
Joseph Sbaffoni, DEP-BMS
Jeff Stanchek, DEP-BMS
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS

Chairman Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler opened the meeting. All Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council affiliations were represented except for the at-large members appointed by the Senate and House. Introductions were made around the table for the benefit of PEMA member Pam Weeks who attended by way of speaker phone.

Minutes from the September 13, 2010, meeting held in Lancaster were reviewed. A motion was made by John Kline and seconded by Tom Hoffman to accept the minutes as submitted.

Report from Bureau of Mine Safety on Activities Since September 2010, Meeting

Jeff Stanchek updated the council on the Bureau's activities since the last meeting. He informed the group that all EMS coordinators for each county with mines received either an electronic or hard copy of the MFF Implementation Plan. Also, all operators of underground mines have received a copy with instructions that they would receive updates at beginning of year. Updates are necessary mainly due to the change of liaisons internally. All operators are in compliance with MFF Act. The manual and a list of active mines was also distributed to PEMA coordinators in each county where an active mine is located. Jeff did not receive any feedback to report to the council regarding changes or addressing any issues.

Mine family liaison training at the MSHA Academy in Beckley, WV, is tentatively scheduled for the week of August 8. MSHA will have staff from across the country attend and we have been

given space to use for individuals who have not gone, as well as new liaisons due to DEP change of personnel. A training session was not held last year due to the Upper Big Branch disaster.

The Mine Emergency Response Development (MERD) exercise at the MTTC last October was successful. Mine Families First was incorporated into a separate part of their training. Another MERD is scheduled for September 21-22 and a block will again be reserved for Mine Families First.

Joe Scaffoni recently attended a meeting of the Interstate Mining Compact Commission. The Commission will assist MSHA at a meeting on May 11 in Triadelphia to identify emergency response capabilities and resources and interactions with state agencies.

Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler stated that Pennsylvania is the only state that has this kind of program, so Pennsylvania is a model. MSHA does have a family program as a result of the Miner Act.

Joe Scaffoni suggested having input from people involved in the incidents at Sago, Darby, Upper Big Branch, and Crandall Canyon at the August liaison training to see what worked and what didn't. He is going to discuss this with Joe Main. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler also suggested talking to the individuals who suffered the losses and finding out what helped them or what could have been done to help them during and after the mine disasters.

Judith Shabbick read an excerpt from a 3-part series that NPR (National Public Radio) did where a family member stated how the atmosphere changed when an announcement was made that there were no survivors at the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster. The link to this article will be provided to MFFAC members.

Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler stressed the importance of having local people assisting during an emergency if possible, rather than state and federal people "taking over". It is recommended that a local/county mine families support system should take priority if they have the resources, followed by state involvement, then federal.

Highlights of Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Annual Conference

Pam Weeks gave a brief outline of the PEMA conference held in Lancaster last September in which the MFFAC took part. Over 600 people attended last year. This year's conference is scheduled for September 24-28 at the Holiday Inn on Lindle Road in Harrisburg. Pam will request an invitation for MFFAC members to attend. Registration is in June, and Pam will give Allison information to pass on to the MFFAC. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler explained the MFFAC's participation and the success of their session in last year's conference to those present who did not attend the meeting. This year's conference will include a session on the Chilean mine rescue, the Fort Hood shooting, and the natural gas explosion in San Bruno, CA. The council expressed an interest in attending the session on Chile.

Nomination/Election of New Chairperson

The chairman explained the nomination process. After notifying members that her three year term was complete in Spring 2011, she asked if anyone was interested. She then called all members to ask if they were interested or would like to nominate someone. Two members stepped forward – Tom Hoffman and Pam Weeks. Judith Shabbick was nominated by another member. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler called Judith who respectfully declined to accept her nomination. This left the two nominees and a ballot was typed up. However, after much thought Pam Weeks, withdrew her name due to numerous other commitments. The Chairman asked for further nominations. With none, ballots were distributed and members voted unanimously to elect Tom Hoffman as the next Chairman of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council for a three-year term.

Tom expressed his appreciation to Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler for all she has done as the first chairperson to the council. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler expressed her thanks to the members and her hopes that the chairmanship will move through all of the represented stakeholders on the MFFAC.

Old Business:

Long-Term Confinement - This issue was brought up at the September meeting due to the Chili entrapment during that time. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler said that she is presently conducting research on the topic and suggested this issue be tabled and looked at in the future.

Disaster Mental Health - *Disaster* mental health personnel (vs. mental health personnel) are individuals trained to work with normal people who have been in a traumatic situation. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler recommended that she and Judith Shabbick work together to define the concept for PA mine operators and compile a resource list (as a suggestion, not a mandate) that would go into the manual to educate mining industry on what to look for when seeking mental health support pre, during and post a mine disaster.. Pam Weeks asked if they would be looking at de-cort teams. Judith said that there are already disaster mental health teams arranged by county and they are an excellent research. John Kline suggested considering the Keystone Crisis Intervention Team as a resource. Tom Hoffman suggested having this resource list incorporated into the MFF document.

Body Recovery Presentation

Michael A. Baker, Indiana County Coroner, gave a presentation to the Advisory Council members on the legal aspects of body recovery in Pennsylvania mines and a coroner's perspective of what happens in a mine fatality.

He first explained the 'coal mining family' culture. Miners are tight-knit group of people, everyone knows everyone else, and they have their own jargon.

Things to DO when a mining fatality occurs:

- Ensure that all others are out of harm's way (account for everyone).
- Ensure controllable hazards are mitigated pull power if needed)
- Maintain pumps (if possible)

- Evacuate the remaining crew
- Sequester and secure the area (entire section if possible)
- Contact 911 at once

Things NOT TO DO when a mining fatality occurs:

- Move the body (except to prevent imminent danger to others) – Coroner must view first
- Rock dust (unless imminent danger would otherwise result) – covers evidence
- Moving machinery unless absolutely necessary for safety
- Cover the body with a sheet, canvas, tarp, blanket, etc. – lose fiber evidence in homicide cases so this may not be as important to follow in a mining fatality
- Permit ingress by unnecessary or unauthorized personnel
- Attempt to make notification of the family or speak to the media

The CORONER has jurisdiction over the body according to the law. Mr. Baker explained the purpose and job of coroner in accordance with Section 1237 – Coroner’s Investigations and Section – Bodies Not To Be Moved of the County Code. Section 1237 (c) states that, “As part of this investigation, the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.”

What should we do first when called to the mine?

- Joint caucus of investigators and other interested personnel
- Identify personnel and establish jurisdictions by agency
 - Coroner, Law, Company, Union, Federal, State, Other agencies
- How will removal be accomplished? Who do we need to help?
 - Miners from uninvolved shift? Mine rescue? SMRT?
- How will we sequester others when the body is retrieved?
 - Support agency

Special needs of the Coroner’s Office

- Access to proper clothing and equipment
- Routine safety briefing and review of use of equipment
- Assignment to an experienced person who knows escape routes
- Instructions on restrictions of photo equipment in mine
- Access to witnesses and others involved in the incident
- Access to Human Resources personnel and records
- Access to phones while outside the mine
- Access to internet connection while outside the mine
- Withholding of information from the media until appropriate

Remember that some personnel have never been underground.

Important things to remember:

- Must resist insistence of others to remove the body prematurely
- Others involved should be checked for injury and cleared
- Those involved should be isolated from potential hostility

- Witnesses and others involved should not be released from the area
- If public safety is an issue, take immediate appropriate measures
- Prepare for needs of CISD, counseling and emotional support

Special circumstances (>1 or mass fatalities)

- Consider Family Assistance Center
- Consider implementation of county Mass Fatalities Plan
- Implement NIMS Protocol

Entombment (final internment) within the mine (never dealt with so these were covered more as questions)

- Always the solution of very last resort
- All possibility of recovery must be tried before abandonment
- Families get little closure and will always ‘wonder if...’
- Requires the permanent idling of at least a section of the mine
- If ICCO was doing this, first as the governor for an order
- Everyone needs to be involved in the decision: FAMILY, coroner, company, union, federal, state and county and local officials, DOL, property owners, community...
- The family may never come to terms with the need to do this

Caring for Mine Families in a Fatality Incident

- Proper care of the family begins with proper care of the body
- Involves proper care of co-workers who were there at the time
- The most important things that must be provided to the families
 - Privacy – Notification can be devastating and should be discreet
 - Information – Everything possible as soon as possible
 - Time – As much as they need to notify other loved ones
 - Separation – From the ‘business part’ This is ‘family’ for them
 - Inclusion – As information develops, families are ‘in the loop’
 - Opportunity – To redeem *something* from the loss (CORE) - Center for Organ Recovery and Education
 - Permission – To be angry, indignant, quiet, tearful, thankful

Case Studies

- Three men died in local mines – 1 medical and 2 by machinery
- No attempt at resuscitation – 2 bodies remained in the mine
- Things the families remember most
 - One difficult notification (one was done in too public a place)
 - Notification by personnel who had not done this before (2 of 3)
 - Not enough info about incident (in 2 cases, not at the mine)
 - Didn’t know where the body was (2 of 3 cases)
 - Didn’t know what would happen next (no idea of protocol)
 - One ‘paperwork issue’ occurred next day (‘all about business’)

Family interactions must be properly accomplished.

Mike's 4 Bright Ideas for Public Service

1. Utmost professionalism – always remember that people need you to know what to do next. Even when you're not sure yourself, it helps to conduct yourself as if you do. Then ask for help. Nobody knows how to do everything. But there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors.)
2. Humility of spirit – there is nothing worse than finding out that you're the only person in the room who thinks you're amazing. (No explanation required.)
3. Over the top - there is no appreciable limit to the lengths to which we will go the help someone. Sometimes that might mean that we help a family from out of state to go see the site of an accident that took the life of someone close to them.
4. Under the radar – Do it all as quietly as you can. God already knew this was going to happen. It's none of anyone else's business. What may seem like a public spectacle to everyone else is still someone's private tragedy. (Sometimes it's better just to call and talk to the chief than to blow the siren.)

Final point

Everyone you have to deal with today has some kind of struggle going on. They may appear to have it all together on the outside, but somewhere. They are dealing with something that only they know about. If they are acting out in some way, remember that we don't know just what the deeper issues might be, so suck it up. Welcome to leadership.

Michael will provide a copy of his PowerPoint presentation which will be passed on to the MFFAC. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler thanked Michael for his excellent and relevant presentation.

The council all agreed with Tom Hoffman's suggestion that Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler write a thank you to Michael Baker from the MFFAC and that the council continue to interact with him.

After the council decides what direction they are taking, Pam Weeks suggested getting feedback from the families, as well as the Coroner's Association.

Judith Shabbick spoke with the commander of the disaster–mortuary (de-mort) team and family assistance team regarding help for long term body recovery for families. The family assistance center is more concerned with identifying bodies and not mental health support. De-mort is always available for that but are not mine-trained. Team would be willing to look at it, but it would be a huge undertaking. Judith asked Joe Sbaffoni if SMRT would be able to assist with that to which he replied that they would.

New Business:

Next Meeting Date and Location

The next meeting will be held on September 26 at 1:30 p.m. at the PEMA Headquarters in Harrisburg. Pam Weeks will reserve a room for this meeting. The MFFAC will then be able to

attend the Chilean mine rescue session at the PEMA Conference at the Holiday Inn the following morning. Pam Weeks will see if PEMA can cover lodging expenses as done last year.

A motion was made by Tom Hoffman and seconded by Pam Weeks to adjourn meeting at 1:47 p.m.