

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
Lancaster, PA
September 13, 2010

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on April 22 in the Conestoga II Meeting Room at the Lancaster Host Hotel and Conference Center in Lancaster. The meeting began at 3:10 p.m.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Chairperson Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, NIOSH
Rickie Polke, At-Large Member - House
John Kline, UMWA
Alfred Brown, At-Large Member - Senate
Judith Shabbick, SMRT
Pam Weeks, PEMA

Others Present:

Joseph Sbaffoni, DEP-BMS
Jeff Stanchek, DEP-BMS
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS
Chris Anderson, SMRT Alternate

Chairman Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler opened the meeting. Introductions were made around the table and a list of members and alternates was distributed to those present. All Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council affiliations were represented with the exception of the Pennsylvania Coal Association -- both the member and alternate had prior commitments. Minutes from the April 22, 2010, meeting held in Uniontown were reviewed. A motion was made by Rickie Polke and seconded by Pam Weeks to accept the minutes as submitted.

Report from Bureau of Mine Safety on Activities Since April 22, 2010, Meeting

Jeff Stanchek updated the council on progress of the Resource Manual. An electronic copy of the manual was distributed to PEMA coordinators in each county where an active mine was located. A list of active mines was also distributed to the coordinators.

Since April 22, Jeff attempted to arrange for an individual to come before the council and give a presentation on the Upper Big Branch mine explosion. To date, nothing has been set up.

He also contacted Cheryl McGill from MSHA regarding scheduling a class in the near future at the academy in Beckley, WV, for family liaison training for those individuals not yet trained. No training has been set up yet.

A Mine Emergency Response Development exercise (MERD) is scheduled for October 19-20 at the Mine Technology and Training Center (MTTC) in Ruff Creek. This MERD will be held in conjunction with the Bureau of Mine Safety and MSHA. Liaisons that have already been trained will be role playing as family members and other involved parties. Council members who are interested in being involved will notify Allison Gaida.

Highlights of Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Annual Conference

Pam Weeks gave a brief outline of the PEMA conference and the various specialty seminars going on simultaneously over the weekend, as well as those being held during the Emergency Management Conference.

At the last meeting, Pam Weeks invited the Chairman and a DEP representative to take part in a panel presentation at the PEMA Conference. Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler and Jeff Stanchek conducted a session entitled “Mine Disaster Planning & Response” to an audience of public safety related state agencies across the Commonwealth, local coordinators, and first responders.

Discussion: Lessons Learned from Upper Big Branch, WV, Disaster

At the time this meeting agenda was developed, Chairman hoped that there would be information available that she, Jeff Stanchek, or Pam Weeks would be able to share with the council. However, the MSHA report is not completed, and the confidentiality issue, as well as the ‘freshness’ of the disaster, has led to limited available public information.

New Business:

Body Recovery

Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler brought to the table her concern on what kind of training mine rescue personnel receive and how families would deal in the event that a body is in the mine for a long period of time. She stated that recovery of the body is critical for a family and not always thought of or talked about. There is no curriculum or training in that area that she is familiar with which could be applied to mining.

Though Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler may not be able to attend the MERD, she will provide materials to Jeff Stanchek to distribute to those who will be attending. She asked if the council would like to consider developing a protocol for dealing with this issue.

Judith Shabbick suggested having a speaker from the National Disaster Mortuary Team come to present information to the council. She will coordinate with the Region 3 headquarters in PA to see if this can be arranged for the next meeting.

Long-Term Confinement

In light of the recent entrapment of the miners in Chile, Chairman Kowalski-Trakofler brought up this issue of extended entrapment to the advisory council. Bureau of Mine Safety Director Joseph Sbaffoni gave an update on the situation in Chile as of this date. He explained that the Chilean government is doing the rescue and the progress made so far. A discussion was held on the potential for PA miners being trapped for long periods. This issue will be brought up as an agenda item at the next meeting.

After Care and Extended Care for Families

Judith Shabbick brought up the issue of after care and extended care for families after a disaster. A discussion on the importance of having trained Disaster Mental Health counselors as opposed to mental health counselors was explained. General mental health professionals are trained in psychopathology (mental illness), as opposed to those mental health professionals who have had disaster mental health training. Disaster mental health personnel recognize that these are normal people having had an extraordinary experience. Therefore, treatment is different. The advisory council may agree to make a recommendation to mine operators on this issue. However, the recommendation was not formally adopted until further discussion at the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date and Location

The next meeting will be held on April 28, 2011, at 10 a.m. at the Bureau of Mine Safety Training Facility in Marion Center.

A motion was made by Rickie Polke and seconded by Pam Weeks to adjourn meeting at 4:45 p.m.