

**MINUTES**  
**Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council**  
**Harrisburg, PA**  
**September 26, 2011**

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on September 26 at the PEMA Headquarters, 2605 Interstate Drive, Harrisburg, PA. The meeting began at 1:38 p.m.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Thomas Hoffman, PCA, Chairman  
Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, NIOSH  
John Kline, UMWA  
Judith Shabbick, SMRT  
Rickie Polke, At-Large Member - House  
Alfred Brown, At-Large Member - Senate

Others Present:

Richard Fink, UMWA (Alternate for John Kline)  
Joseph Sbaffoni, DEP-BMS  
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS

Chairman Tom Hoffman opened the meeting. All Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council affiliations were represented except for PEMA. Pam Weeks and her alternate Roland Mertz were deployed to the Joint Field Office to help coordinate Disaster Recovery Centers due to recent flooding and were unable to attend.

Minutes from the April 28, 2011, meeting held at the Marion Center Mine Rescue and Training Facility in Home, PA were reviewed. A motion was made by Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler and seconded by Rickie Polke to accept the minutes as submitted.

*Report from Bureau of Mine Safety on Activities Since April 28, Meeting*

Bureau of Mine Safety Director Joseph Sbaffoni updated the council on the Bureau's activities since the last meeting since Jeffrey Stancheck was unable to attend.

Bureau of Mine Safety staff and DEP Community Relation Coordinators (CRCs) attended Mine Family Liaison Training at the MSHA Training Academy in Beaver, WV, on August 8-10. Bureau of Mine Safety Liaisons Rod Shabbick, Dustin Mowery, and Allison Gaida, along with Judith Shabbick will attend Psychological First Aid and Disaster Preparedness for Community Partners on September 30 in Indiana County.

It was planned to have elements of the Mine Family Liaison training in the September 14 Anthracite MERD, however PEMA and other EMS personnel were activated for flooding due to

Hurricane Irene. The anthracite is much more in need of something like that if something would happen because of the remoteness of the facilities.

Judith Shabbick gave a brief account of the Mine Family Liaison training at the MSHA academy. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) shared their expertise on how to handle a family situation following a transportation disaster. MSHA staff discussed the Cradle Canyon and Upper Big Branch (UBB) disasters. Judith found the whole conference to be very candid. She said that they used Quecreek as a starting reference. They also discussed having a county attorney present at a disaster to help family members know how to address legalities, power of attorney (giving the family members a way to cash the next check to pay the mortgage), etc. If participating, attorneys should give guidance within the first couple days without taking any of the hope away. This was offered during briefings for those who would be interested. The legality issue was not mentioned in the Mine Families First Plan.

Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler saw a fundamental flaw in selecting the NTSB as a model because miners are a close community. They live near the disaster site; they know each other and are there to help one another. A transportation incident involves people from all over. She believed it would be best to have solicitor on the state level instead of expecting every county to come up with someone. This person could give a brief scenario of what you would need to do to cash loved one's check while they are being rescued.

Judith also said they worked with American Red Cross who did child care, medical (insulin needs) and then contracted with comfort animals for the kids. It was the family who decided when closure was done and leave the building. UBB never closed the building; it was up to the family members when they were ready to leave. Judith would like to see a 'next step' after closure. This could increase the trauma because it really isn't over for the family members.

#### Highlights of Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Annual Conference

Highlights will be given to the MFFAC at the next meeting as Pam Weeks was unable to attend this meeting.

#### Lessons Pennsylvania Can Learn from the Upper Big Branch (UBB) Reports:

MSHA has not issued a final report.

Tom Hoffman and Joe Sbaffoni discussed bringing in an individual that spoke at the Mine Family Liaison training in Beckley to the next MFFAC meeting. This would be educational for the MFFAC to decide if/how we want to revise our plan. Judith will provide the names from the training to Tom Hoffman.

Joe Sbaffoni gave an update on mine rescue facilities and training. All rescue apparatus is updated with state-of-the-art equipment. Metal/non-metal mine rescue teams participated in M/NM contest in Carmichaels. Two drills are done in anthracite area -- one as a MERD and one as a competition. Kathleen said that she would like to observe MERD and integrate family members to participate as role players.

Disaster Mental Health:

Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler and Judith Shabbick met after the official council meeting. Tom Hoffman asked if they would be ready to present at the next meeting. However, Kathleen said that this is not as easy as she had originally thought.

**New Business:**

Joe Scaffoni and Tom Hoffman will follow up on power of attorney issue and try to schedule a UBB presentation that will involve one or two people. Tom Hoffman would like the speakers be provided with a copy of our plan prior to the meeting. He also suggested that all members also review the plan.

Next Meeting Date and Location

The MFFAC members were asked to hold the dates of April 17 and 24, 2012, as tentative meeting dates. Judith Shabbick suggested having the meeting in at the MSHA Academy in West Virginia. The date and location will be based on the availability of speakers and be determined by the end of October in order to meet the DEP Policy Office deadline for publication in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

A motion was made by Rickie Polke and seconded by Judith Shabbick to adjourn meeting at 2:40 p.m.