

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
Uniontown, PA
October 31, 2013

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on October 31 in the Calloway Room at the Fayette County Health Center, 100 New Salem Road, in Uniontown, PA.

Attendance:

Members Present:

Thomas Hoffman, PCA, Chairman
Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, Mental Health Professional
Judith Shabbick, Special Medical Response Team (SMRT)
John Kline, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)

Others Present:

Joseph Scaffoni, DEP-BMS
Mark Lepore, Mental Health Professional alternate
Richard Fink, UMWA alternate
Christopher Anderson, SMRT alternate
Jeffrey Stancheck, DEP-BMS
Allison Gaida, DEP-BMS

Chairman Tom Hoffman opened the meeting at 10:20 a.m. Chairman Hoffman introduced himself, and then asked for introductions around the room. Pamela Weeks, PA Emergency Management Agency; Edward Rinda, House Appointee; and Alfred Brown, Senate appointee were not in attendance.

Minutes from the April 24, 2012, meeting held in Harrisburg, PA, were reviewed.

A motion was made by Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler and seconded by John Kline to accept the minutes as submitted. All members accepted the motion and it passed unanimously.

Chairman Hoffman explained the purpose of this meeting and that no other meetings had been held during 2013 because no mine disasters occurred during the year which would trigger the requirement that the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council meet.

Dr. Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler commented that the council should consider meeting, not only to fulfill the obligations under the Act, but to discuss and learn from accidents in other states and not focus only on accidents in Pennsylvania. Judith Shabbick suggested inviting a family member or community spokesman who may be willing to share their experience. Discussion took place on how this could be helpful and how a mining disaster impacts a community.

Bureau of Mine Safety Report of Activities:

Bureau of Mine Safety Director Joseph Scaffoni updated the Mine Families First Response and Communication Advisory Council on the Bureau's activities. The Department has decided that the family liaisons are going to be the CRCs from different areas. Even though MSHA had initially conducted mine family liaison training, for the past few years no training has been done in this area. Tom Hoffman asked how information that the council learns is shared with operators. Bureau Director Scaffoni stated that the Department has done a good job of getting the message out to industry. After the implementation plan was developed, it was distributed to the industry, and operators were required to implement. Director Scaffoni relayed a Mine Emergency Response Development (MERD) exercise that was held last year where a mine was actually shut down and treated as an actual mine disaster. A family center was set up and people role-played the parts of family members and the operator. Pennsylvania has not had a fatality in a bituminous underground mine since June of 2009.

Mental Health Issues in a Mine Disaster:

Dr. Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler and Judith Shabbick made a presentation at the last meeting on mental health issues that can accompany a mine disaster and provided suggestions to the council based on their findings. The council was supportive, and it was determined to proceed with next step, which was to notify the operators and come together with a list of people and organizations within their geographical location with whom they could develop a relationship. Dr. Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler and Judith Shabbick developed a draft memo and presented it to the council, along with a list of volunteers trained in disaster mental health. The memo recommends that the mine owner/operators reach out to the contact in their geographical area so that, in an event of a disaster, the resource personnel have some knowledge of the mine.

The Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual that was distributed to the operators in 2010 was discussed. Bureau Director Scaffoni stated that a memo should be sent to the industry and the Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual be updated to include the DCORT (Disaster Crisis Outreach Referral Teams) information. Chairman Hoffman suggested changing the color of the manual to distinguish it as an updated document.

Jeff Stanek explained that the manual is updated every year, but updates have not been provided to Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council members.

A motion was made by John Kline that, based upon the presentation by the mental health professionals, the Bureau Director of Mine Safety will provide to coal mine operators: a memo explaining the importance of mental health issues that accompany mine disasters; a list of disaster-trained mental health professionals; and will include in the resource manual the appropriate contact information. The Department will update the Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual by the end of 2013 and distribute the memo and manual to the industry. The motion was seconded by Judith Shabbick, and the motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

There was no new business to discuss.

Public Comments:

No members attended from the public; therefore, there were no public comments.

Next Meeting Date and Location:

It was suggested to hold the 2014 annual meeting in conjunction with the PEMA Conference which is held in September or October. Council member Pam Weeks will be contacted regarding the possibility.

With no further business to discuss,

A motion was made by Chairman Hoffman and seconded by Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler to adjourn meeting at 11:55 a.m.