

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
New Stanton, PA
October 18, 2021

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held on October 18, 2021, in the Westmoreland Room at the DEP New Stanton Office in New Stanton, PA. The meeting was held in person and using a Microsoft Teams meeting platform.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Judith Shabbick, Local Emergency Response, Acting Chairperson
Joseph Scaffoni, At-Large-Member- House, Chairperson
Philip Barker, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA)
Mark Lepore, Mental Health Professional
Grafton Eliason, Mental Health Professional-Alternate

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA TEAMS

Ron Bowersox, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)
Frank Reidelbach, UMWA-Alternate
Christopher Anderson, Local Emergency Response - Alternate

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STAFF PRESENT

Dustin Mowery, Bureau of Mine Safety (BMS)
Margaret Scheloske, BMS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STAFF PRESENT VIA TEAMS

Richard Wagner, Bureau Director, BMS

Acting Chairperson Judith Shabbick called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Introductions were made.

Nomination and Election of Chairperson:

Acting Chairperson Judith Shabbick reported that she had canvassed all primary members and then opened the floor for nominations for Chairperson of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council.

A motion was made by Judith Shabbick to nominate Joe Scaffoni for Chairperson of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Council. There was a roll call vote:

Shabbick-Yes

Lepore – Yes
Barker – Yes
Bowersox – Yes
Sbaffoni – Abstained

The motion passed.

Bureau of Mine Safety Report of Activities:

Bureau of Mine Safety Director Richard Wagner gave an overview of the Bureau's activities since the last meeting in 2019.

Operational Status

Anthracite: 10 Active operations which includes 3 tour mines, 3 currently idled. One of which (No. 13 Slope) will most likely be sealed but ownership is considering opening a new mine. Another (No. 1, operated by M&D Anthracite), is expected to resume production after a recent change in ownership.

Bituminous: 26 Active and 2 Idled.

Industrial Minerals: Currently 25 active operations which include businesses in mines. There are 10 mines/caverns that are currently idled. It is anticipated the number of industrial mineral operations may grow if the Infrastructure Bill is passed by the Federal Government.

Fatal Accident Summary

There have been four fatalities. One of which was not chargeable to the industry as it was found to be medically related. That specific accident occurred at Rosebud Mining Company's Brush Valley Mine. A preshift examiner was entering the mine via the slope using a 2-man personnel carrier when he suffered a medical emergency. As a result, he lost control of his vehicle, struck the rib, and was ejected from the Johnson.

The other three accidents were all classified in the same category as a fall of roof/face/or rib. Two of these were in the bituminous coal fields, the other occurred in anthracite.

A longwall section foreman at Consol Energy's Enlow Fork Mine was fatally injured when he was struck by a large piece of rib as he was passing the section stage loader.

The other bituminous fatality occurred at Rosebud Mining Company's Kocjancic Mine. A continuous miner operator was fatally injured by a piece of roof when he positioned himself inby permanent support.

The fatality in the anthracite region occurred at Kimmel's Mining, Inc. Williamstown Mine #1 on a pillaring section when a miner was struck by a piece of roof when digging a hitch to set a timer.

Mr. Lepore stated for the record that, as a mental health representative, he is available to provide support in those situations as needed.

Director Wagner offered to forward a copy of his report to the members.

Review of Mine Family First Response and Communications Implementation Plan

Dustin Mowery distributed current copies of the Bureau of Mine Safety Emergency Response Plan. Peggy will forward to the members who were not present.

Old Business

History of Council

Judith Shabbick presented a review of the Mine Family First Response and Communications Implementation Plan. She reported that the Council was organized when House Bill 483 went into effect in 2007, modeled after DEP and the Quecreek incident and efforts that were made to address families so that they were treated with dignity and respect. The Council was tasked with four things: 1. Appoint a chairperson 2. Create bylaws 3. Create an implementation plan and 4. review incidents or meet once per year. We have kept up with the four points of the law and have met the objective for meeting apart from last year. The Council was tasked with reviewing the Whitney Mine incident 4/19/2015, recommendations were not made, as the company did follow their base plan.

There are two parts of the law, DEP's responsibility, and the Advisory Council's responsibility. The Council's responsibility is to review any mine emergency incidents, which has only occurred one time. The Council has investigated body recovery so families could have dignity and closure and had a coroner as a guest speaker. The Council looked for resources who could help with body recovery and determined that it could be SMRT, as this is a DEP entity and trained in this area. Under the guidance of the then chairperson, Dr. Kathleen Kowalski-Trakofler, disaster mental health, was introduced where we are not looking at sickness, but we are looking at how people are rising to the challenge of meeting an extraordinary event. Recommendations were presented in 2014 to mine owners, to provide disaster mental health and use local services to support the local mining community. This was well received.

Mike Dickerson from Upper Big Branch was a guest speaker and he spoke about that mine disaster and shared that he was struggling with his mental health and conveyed that mine rescuers would benefit from assistance with their mental health. It was suggested that when we do mine training, we add a mental health piece. In 2017, Judith Shabbick and Dr. Lepore did insert a mental health program in MERD training and it was well received.

There has been no further training these past two years, and she suggested that we may want to investigate this area as a Council going forward.

Approval of April 9, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the April 9, 2019, meeting held in DEP New Stanton were reviewed.

A motion was made by Ron Bowersox to accept the minutes. The motion was seconded by Mark Lepore and all members accepted the motion. The minutes passed unanimously.

Membership:

Judith Shabbick reported that there is a long history of trying to have all the council positions filled. It has been difficult convincing the governing offices to fill vacancies in voluntary councils. The following is the current organization:

PCA: Rachel Gleason, Alternate: Vacant
UMWA: Ron Bowersox, Alternate: Frank Reidelbach
SMRT: Judith Shabbick, Alternate: Chris Anderson expired: 8/16/2020
Mental Health: Lepore Alternate: Grafton Eliason
PEMA: Phillip Barker Alternate: William Spencer
Senate: Raymond Bashline expired 1/10/20 Alternate: Vacant
House: Joseph Sbaffoni, Alternate: None

Peggy will inform Mr. Bashline that the committee plans on meeting in October and will not be meeting in the summertime. Mr. Anderson will submit his resume and letter of interest. Peggy will forward a request to the House and President Pro-Tempore and request assistance from Rachel Gleason on following up with these positions as well as obtaining an alternate candidate for the vacant PCA position.

Mr. Bowersox requested clarification on his reappointment as a primary member. Peggy reported that he would act as primary and would officially be appointed by the Governor when his term expires in May of 2022. Mr. Bowersox also requested that the Bureau of Mine Safety website be updated.

New Business

Chairperson Comments

Chairperson Sbaffoni commented that as a council, we are responsible for being prepared in the event of an accident and to assure that mine operators have updated plans. The Department is responsible for having designated liaisons and providing training. The Department is in the process of obtaining training for the liaisons; but it is unclear who the liaisons will be. When the Advisory Council first started, it was thought that a communications persons from each regional office would work as liaisons, in the event of any emergency, because if it was a mine emergency there was someone available for the mine families, since the Mine Safety staff would be unavailable for this purpose. The Department needs to decide who they are going to appoint, and it is also important that they be properly trained.

Dustin Mowery reported that he has made inquiries to both MSHA and NIOSH regarding training; but there has been no response to date. It is understood that MSHA has provided liaison training annually, and we could either duplicate or participate with them. Dustin will follow-up.

He also reported that there are currently two communications persons in Harrisburg, who were trained in 2019. Dustin would like to have at least four on the list. Chairperson Sbaffoni would like to see at least two from each of the six regions.

Philip Barker noted that the Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual that was distributed need updated and he will provide contact information to Dustin for revisions.

Dr. Lepore asked if the committee could also be trained and if the liaison would reach out to different community members? Discussion ensued. Yes, the committee can be trained. According to the Bylaws, the liaison should be the family contact and will reach out to the responsible emergency response entity, geared through PEMA, emergency management or other emergency services office.

The Council recommends the following: Request that the Department provide an up-to-date Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual, establish who the liaisons are, provide annual training to the liaisons and fill the vacancies in the Council.

Bylaws

The Council was encouraged to review the Bylaws and the Act to see if there are any recommendations for changes to be presented at the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date and Location:

The Council discussed meeting dates and places. Judith Shabbick noted that the Council must make sure that they are meeting annually. It was also noted that a hybrid format should be utilized so that the meetings are more inclusive. Peggy will explore meeting formats with IT so that a screen can be utilized for meetings and provide several options for meeting dates when setting up the next meeting.

Mr. Barker reported that PEMA will be meeting with Keystone Emergency Management Association this month virtually and possibly in person together next year. They usually meet in October in Altoona. He will inform the Council about meeting dates for 2022. The Council will explore having a meeting in conjunction with PEMA. According to the Bylaws, appointed members shall be reimbursed for all necessary expenses or the alternate if serving in place of the appointed member.

**A motion was made by Judith Shabbick and seconded by Mark Lepore:
The Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
will meet next October in conjunction with the PEMA conference in October
or a hybrid meeting will be scheduled no later than October 2022. The motion
passed unanimously.**

Council Well Being

Dr. Mark Lepore provided a hand-out outlining four areas of stress in our environment that have been affecting the population and gave a presentation to the members about well-being during the stress and hardship that the Covid Pandemic has created.

Adjourn

A motion was made by Ron Bowersox and seconded by Judith Shabbick to adjourn the meeting at 11:42 a.m. The motion passed unanimously.