

MINUTES
Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council
New Stanton, PA
October 13, 2023

A meeting of the Mine Families First Response and Communications Advisory Council was held October 13, 2023, in the Westmoreland Room at the DEP New Stanton Office in New Stanton, PA. The meeting was held in person and using Microsoft Teams. Chairperson Scaffoni informed the group that the meeting was being recorded for transcription purposes only.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph Scaffoni, At-Large-Member- House, Chairperson
Philip Barker, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA)
Ron Bowersox, UMWA
Mark Lepore, Mental Health Professional
Grafton Eliason, Mental Health Professional-Alternate

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA TEAMS

Chris Anderson, for Judy Shabbick, Local Emergency Response- Alternate
Chris Selfridge- PEMA-Alternate

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STAFF PRESENT

Richard Wagner, Bureau of Mine Safety (BMS)
Margaret Scheloske, BMS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STAFF PRESENT VIA TEAMS

Malik Boyd, Director of Communications
Lauren Camarda, Regional Communications Manager for Southwest Region
Max Schultz, Policy Office, Deputy House Director for Energy Resources

After confirming a quorum, Chairperson Joe Scaffoni called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.

Approval of October 28, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the October 28, 2022, meeting held at DEP New Stanton were reviewed.

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

Introductions were made around the room and via Microsoft Teams.

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 2022.

Fatal Accident Summary

Acosta Mine

Regarding the fatality that occurred on October 22, 2022 at the Acosta Mine, where a 47-year-old mine examiner was found in a sump by the superintendent and was pronounced deceased by the Somerset County's Assistant Coroner after the victim was brought to the surface. The Department is still waiting to hear from MSHA regarding chargeability; whether it was an accident or a medical event. When this occurs, the Bureau will complete its final report.

Maple Springs Mine

A fatality occurred on October 2, 2023 at the LCT, Maple Springs Mine located in Somerset County. An individual was struck by a shuttle-car in an active loading section and was fatally wounded as a result of his injuries. The investigation is ongoing.

Dr. Lepore asked if interview sessions during investigations were recorded or if there were multiple interviews. Director Wagner explained that MSHA routinely records the sessions if permission is granted by the interviewee. He further explained that we try to keep the interviews to one time by having the members of the Bureau and MSHA perform the investigation jointly and as soon as possible and second interviews are usually only performed if there are discrepancies. Discussion ensued regarding interviewing techniques. Dr. Lepore suggested that sometimes you may get more information if there is some time between the event and the interview when there is time to process the trauma.

Increase in Fatalities this Year

There was discussion about the increase in fatalities in all areas of mining, more so in the metal/non-metal areas. Director Wagner said that the lack of experienced persons is likely one reason, there may be others as well attributed to this uptick. There is a transition occurring in the workforce with the age demographic getting younger. As a result, there are fewer senior personnel with legacy experience and those that are "experienced" may have less than 5 years.

The Department is looking into creating a qualification for apprentice miners, or "red hats" that will require more enhanced training to ensure that the apprentice miners are more thoroughly trained "outby". For example: belts, and track, not specifically associated with mining of coal. The hope is that the operator will codify that all areas are covered. Part 48 now includes 32 hours instruction and 8 hours underground. The Department would like to add an exam piece that demonstrates that the miner is learning. This is something that may require some regulation changes and involvement by the Board of Coal Mine Safety.

Review of Mine Families First Response and Communication Implementation Plan

The Plan was distributed with the meeting materials and there have been no changes.

Old Business

Mine Families First Resource Reference Manual

An up-to-date reference manual was distributed to the membership. Chairperson Sbaffoni, and the members present reviewed the manual and were pleased with the update. Peggy will send digital copies of the manual to all members.

There was discussion regarding the importance of updated mine rescue training plans for each of the mines and Director Wagner reported that the coal plans are up to date; however, the metal non-metal operators seemed to be somewhat unaware of the MFFRCAC program; he and the Department have been in discussions with the Pennsylvania Aggregates and Concrete Association (PACA) and the operators educating them on the process and requirements. The goal is to offer some type of education program on a regular basis.

Dr. Lepore said that he would be willing to provide a presentation for psychological first aide, disaster mental health or grief and loss and that he would contact Dustin.

Chairperson Sbaffoni, thanked the Bureau for updating the reference manual and for the efforts made in training for the liaisons.

DEP Liaison Training Update

Director Wagner reported that efforts were made to add liaisons, with the focus being on internal departments to add to our current complement of liaisons. The Bureau did this; however, two of those that were appointed have since moved on to other positions. He shared the following information that was provided by Dustin Mowery:

1. On December 12, 2022, the Bureau of Mine Safety (BMS) conducted a Mine Families First Liaison training. Titled *Becoming a Mine Liaison*, where the liaisons learned about their roles and responsibilities during a mine emergency. Training included a course from FEMA Course-IS-242.C: Effective Communication.
2. On April 27, 2023, BMS conducted another training. The stages of grief were reviewed and discussed. Different scenarios were discussed and the actions and reactions that mine families would have at a mine emergency and how they could be dealt with. Mine liaison go bags were discussed, creating a list of items that should be included in the personal bags. The class also completed a psychological first aid course along with this training class.
3. BMS is discussing holding a joint Mine Families First training and a mock emergency response drill “MERD” to include the family aspect, in 2024. Several locations are being discussed. Dustin Mowery is in contact with MSHA regarding a Mine Families First training at the MSHA Academy.

New Business

KEMA Conference

Chairperson Sbaffoni reported that he recently attended the local KEMA conference in Cranberry and provided a presentation regarding the MFFRCAC.

Distribution of Resource Reference Manual

Member Phil Barker said that the Reference Manual would be useful for the PEMA members to reference in a mining emergency. There was discussion about how this could be shared, since this does contain some confidential information. Mr. Barker assured the member that all the entities would know that this is a confidential document. Director Wagner said that the Bureau will review a way to distribute this and a mine's emergency response plan in a manner that would be useful to the county contacts.

Presentations

Chairperson Sbaffoni said that if an organization would like a presentation regarding MFFRCAC, he would be available and Director Wagner added that if anyone would like the Department to provide a presentation regarding Bureau resources, they should contact Dustin Mowery.

There was no other new business.

Public Comments

None.

Teams Participant Comments

Chris Anderson mentioned that the NTSB has classes that include family participation, and, at the request of Chairperson Sbaffoni, he will forward the information to Dustin Mowery.

There were no other comments.

Next Meeting Date and Location:

The Council discussed meeting dates and places and the next meeting was set for October 2, 2024 in the New Stanton District Office.

Adjourn

A motion was made by Mark Lepore and seconded by Ron Bowersox to adjourn the meeting at 11:12 a.m. The motion passed unanimously.