

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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MAR 06 2017

SECRETARY OF LABOR,
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA),

v.

ZEOTECH CORPORATION,

:
:
: Docket No. CENT 2016-149-M
: A.C. No. 41-03374-391575
:
:

BEFORE: Althen, Acting Chairman; Jordan, Young, and Cohen, Commissioners

ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION:

This matter arises under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. (2012) (“Mine Act”). On December 29, 2015, the Commission received from Zeotech Corporation (“Zeotech”) a motion seeking to reopen a penalty assessment that had become a final order of the Commission pursuant to section 105(a) of the Mine Act, 30 U.S.C. § 815(a).

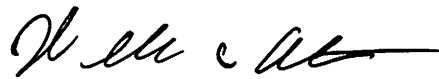
Under section 105(a) of the Mine Act, an operator who wishes to contest a proposed penalty must notify the Secretary of Labor no later than 30 days after receiving the proposed penalty assessment. If the operator fails to notify the Secretary, the proposed penalty assessment is deemed a final order of the Commission. 30 U.S.C. § 815(a).

We have held, however, that in appropriate circumstances, we possess jurisdiction to reopen uncontested assessments that have become final Commission orders under section 105(a). *Jim Walter Res., Inc.*, 15 FMSHRC 782, 786-89 (May 1993) (“*JWR*”). In evaluating requests to reopen final orders, the Commission has found guidance in Rule 60(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, under which the Commission may relieve a party from a final order of the Commission on the basis of mistake, inadvertence, excusable neglect, or other reason justifying relief. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 2700.1(b) (“the Commission and its Judges shall be guided so far as practicable by the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure”); *JWR*, 15 FMSHRC at 787. We have also observed that default is a harsh remedy and that, if the defaulting party can make a showing of good cause for a failure to timely respond, the case may be reopened and appropriate proceedings on the merits permitted. *See Coal Prep. Servs., Inc.*, 17 FMSHRC 1529, 1530 (Sept. 1995).

Records of the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on September 15, 2015, and became a final order of the Commission on October 15, 2015. Zeotech asserts that it did not

timely file a notice of contest in this case because it did not realize that the investigation of the accident involved in this case generated two separate proposed assessments. Zeotech states that it submitted a timely notice of contest for one of the proposed assessments, but did not become aware that the proposed assessment for this case dealt with separate citations until it received a delinquency notice from MSHA. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen but urges the operator to take steps to ensure that future penalty contests are timely filed.

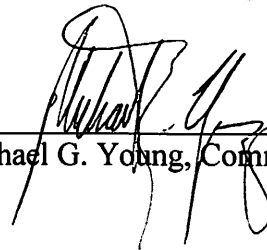
Having reviewed Zeotech's request and the Secretary's response, in the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this matter and remand it to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for further proceedings pursuant to the Mine Act and the Commission's Procedural Rules, 29 C.F.R. Part 2700. Accordingly, consistent with Rule 28, the Secretary shall file a petition for assessment of penalty within 45 days of the date of this order. *See* 29 C.F.R. § 2700.28.



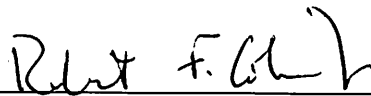
William I. Althen, Acting Chairman



Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner



Michael G. Young, Commissioner



Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner

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