

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., N.W., SUITE 520N
WASHINGTON, DC 20004-1710

September 30, 2020

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. CENT 2020-0055-M
v.	:	A.C. No. 14-01333-49975
	:	
AGGREGATE SAND & GRAVEL, INC.	:	

BEFORE: Rajkovich, Chairman; Althen and Traynor, 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. (2018) (“Mine Act”). On December 27, 2019, the Commission received from Aggregate Sand and Gravel, Inc. (“Aggregate”) 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 21, 2019, and became a final order of the Commission on October 21, 2019. Aggregate contends that it mistakenly mailed its notice of contest to the same address that it mailed payment of the penalties it chose not to contest. 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. The Secretary notes that the proposed penalty assessment clearly provides instructions to mail contest forms to an Arlington, Virginia address, and to mail payments to a St. Louis, Missouri address.

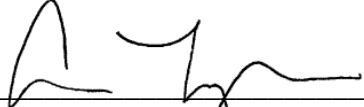
Having reviewed Aggregate's request and the Secretary's response, we find that Aggregate failed to timely contest penalties through inadvertence or mistake, and that such inadvertence or mistake constitutes good cause to reopen the penalty proceeding. In the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this 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.



Marco M. Rajkovich, Jr., Chairman



William I. Althen, Commissioner



Arthur R. Traynor, III, Commissioner

Distribution:

Mark Ysidro
President
Aggregate Sand & Gravel, Inc.
10911 S. Hydraulic
Mulvane, KS 67110
markysidro@towserviceinc.com

Emily Scott, Esq.
Office of the Solicitor
U.S. Department of Labor
201 12th Street South, Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22202-5450
Scott.Emily.T@dol.gov

Chief Administrative Law Judge Glynn Voisin
Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Commission
Office of Administrative Law Judges
1331 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 520N
Washington, DC 20004-1710
GVoisin@fmshrc.gov

Melanie Garris
Office of Civil Penalty Compliance
Mine Safety and Health Administration
U.S. Department of Labor
201 12th Street South, Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22202-5450
Garris.Melanie@DOL.GOV