

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, SUITE 520N  
WASHINGTON, DC 20004-1710

DEC 29 2015

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

v.

CLARKSON CONSTRUCTION  
COMPANY, INC.

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: Docket No. CENT 2015-82-M  
: A.C. No. 14-01578-362338 KTL  
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BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Young and Althen, Commissioners<sup>1</sup>

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 November 12, 2014, the Commission received from Clarkson Construction Company, Inc. (“Clarkson”) 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

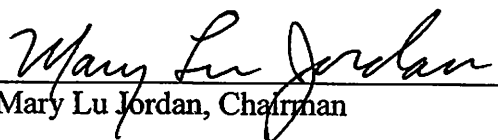
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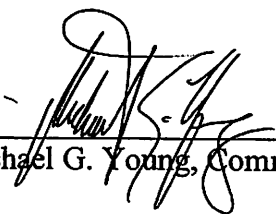
<sup>1</sup> This case has been delegated to a panel of three Commissioners pursuant to section 113(c) of the Mine Act for the limited purpose of assessing the merits of the motion to reopen. 30 U.S.C. § 823(c).


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”) demonstrate that the proposed assessment was delivered on September 26, 2014, and became a final order of the Commission on October 27, 2014. Clarkson asserts that its error arose from a miscommunication between the safety director and the operator’s counsel, which caused the operator to submit the contest form two days late on October 29, 2014. Specifically, there was confusion due to the fact that the counsel had thought that the safety director had filed the contest form for the proposed assessment, while the safety director had thought that the counsel was going to take care of it. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen. However, he urges Clarkson to ensure that future penalty assessments are contested in a timely manner.

Having reviewed Clarkson’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.

  
Mary Lu Jordan, Chairman

  
Michael G. Young, Commissioner

  
William I. Althen, Commissioner

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Chief Administrative Law Judge Robert J. Lesnick  
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