

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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

FEB 19 2016

v.

CASTLE VALLEY MINING, LLC,

:
:
: Docket No. WEST 2015-184
: A.C. No. 42-02335-359669
:
:

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Cohen, and Nakamura, Commissioners¹

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 25, 2014, the Commission received from Castle Valley Mining, LLC (“Castle”) 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).

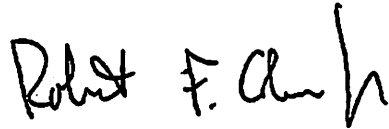
¹ This case has been delegated to a panel of three Commissioners pursuant to section 113(c) of the Mine Act for the limited purpose of assessing the merits of the motion to reopen. 30 U.S.C. § 823(c).

Records of the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on September 4, 2014, and became a final order of the Commission on October 6, 2014. Following receipt of Castle’s motion to reopen, the Commission issued a deficiency letter on July 16, 2015, and Castle filed a revised motion to reopen on August 25, 2015. Castle asserts that it timely mailed the contest form via U.S. First Class Mail and provided an affidavit to that effect. Additionally, Castle has agreed to send all future contest forms via certified mail. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen, but notes that MSHA’s Civil Penalty Compliance Office has no record of receiving a contest form for this case. The Secretary urges the operator to take steps to ensure that future penalty contests are timely filed.

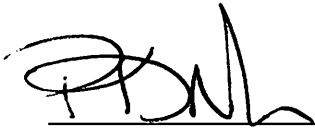
Having reviewed Castle’s request and the Secretary’s response, in the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this matter and remand it to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for further proceedings pursuant to the Mine Act and the Commission’s Procedural Rules, 29 C.F.R. Part 2700. Accordingly, consistent 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



Robert F. Cohen Jr., Commissioner



Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner

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