

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, SUITE 520N
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-1710

APR 30 2015

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

v.

SPARTAN MINING COMPANY, INC.

Docket No. WEVA 2014-176
A.C. No. 46-01544-331181

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Young, Nakamura, and Althen, 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 18, 2013, the Commission received from Spartan Mining Company, Inc. (“Spartan”) 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 Commissioner Cohen has elected not to participate in this matter.


Records of the Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on September 10, 2013, and became a final order of the Commission on October 10, 2013. Spartan asserts that due to a clerical error it contested the proposed assessment on October 11, 2013. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen, and urges the operator to take steps to ensure that future penalty contests are timely filed.²

Having reviewed Spartan'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


Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner


William I. Althen, Commissioner

² We note that this is the fourth time in two years that Spartan has requested reopening of a penalty assessment because of its untimely filing of a notice of contest. *See Inman Energy*, 35 FMSHRC 26 (Jan. 2013); *Spartan Mining Co.*, 35 FMSHRC 1298 (May 2013); *Spartan Mining Co.*, 35 FMSHRC 2052 (July 2013).

Distribution:

Kelby Thomas Gray, Esq.
Dinsmore & Shohl, LLP
P.O. Box 11887
900 Lee Street, Huntington Square
Charleston, WV 25301
kelby.gray@dinsmore.com

Melanie Garris
Office of Civil Penalty Compliance
MSHA
U.S. Dept. Of Labor
1100 Wilson Blvd., 25th Floor
Arlington, VA 22209-3939

W. Christian Schumann, Esq.
Office of the Solicitor
U.S. Department of Labor
1100 Wilson Blvd., Room 2220
Arlington, VA 22209-2296

Chief Administrative Law Judge Robert J. Lesnick
Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Commission
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W., Suite 520N
Washington, D.C. 20004-1710