

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-1710

JUN 18 2015

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

v.

COMMONWEALTH MINING, LLC

Docket No. WEVA 2013-1324
A.C. No. 46-09096-295800-
U677

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 September 24, 2013, the Commission received from Commonwealth Mining, LLC (“Commonwealth”) 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).

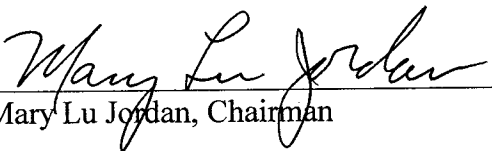
We have held, however, that in appropriate circumstances, we possess jurisdiction to reopen uncontested assessments that have become final Commission orders under section 105(a). *Jim Walter Res., Inc.*, 15 FMSHRC 782, 786-89 (May 1993) (“*JWR*”). In evaluating requests to reopen final orders, the Commission 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.

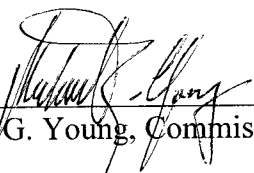
Records of the Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on July 31, 2012, and became a final order of the Commission on August 30, 2012. The assessment was paid in full by the operator by a check dated August 10, 2012. Commonwealth asserts that on March 28, 2012, it requested a conference with MSHA regarding the violations at issue. After MSHA denied Commonwealth's request for a conference, the operator claims that it incorrectly assumed that this denial ended its right to contest the violations at issue. The Secretary opposes the request to reopen as the motion to reopen was filed more than a year after the proposed assessment became a final order.

Rule 60(c) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provides that a Rule 60(b) motion shall be made within a reasonable time, and for reasons of mistake, inadvertence, or excusable neglect, not more than one year after the judgment, order, or proceeding was entered or taken. Fed. R. Civ. P. 60(c). This motion to reopen was filed more than one year after becoming a final order. Therefore, under Rule 60(c), Commonwealth's motion is untimely. *JS Sand & Gravel, Inc.*, 26 FMSHRC 795, 796 (Oct. 2004).


Accordingly, we deny Commonwealth's motion with prejudice.




Mary Lu Jordan, Chairman



Michael G. Young, Commissioner



Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner



William I. Althen, Commissioner

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