

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, SUITE 520N

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-1710

**JUN 22 2015**

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

v.

REX COAL COMPANY, INC.

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Docket No. KENT 2014-490

A.C. No. 15-19260-345221

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Young, Nakamura 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 May 12, 2014, the Commission received from Rex Coal Company Inc. (“Rex”) 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).

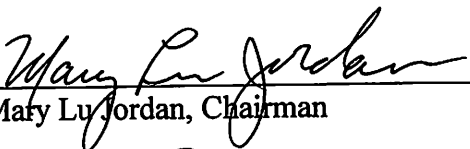
We have held, however, that in appropriate circumstances, we possess jurisdiction to reopen uncontested assessments that have become final Commission orders under section 105(a). *Jim Walter Res., Inc.*, 15 FMSHRC 782, 786-89 (May 1993) (“*JWR*”). In evaluating requests to reopen final orders, the Commission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

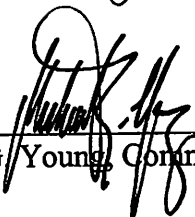
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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner Cohen has elected not to participate in this matter.

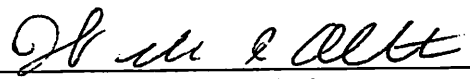
Records of the Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on March 15, 2014, and became a final order of the Commission on April 14, 2014. Rex asserts that it was two days late in contesting the proposed assessment due to a clerical error. 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.

Having reviewed Rex'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.

  
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Mary Lu Jordan, Chairman

  
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Michael G. Young, Commissioner

  
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Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner

  
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William I. Althen, Commissioner

**Distribution:**

**Ronnie Brock  
Rex Coal Company, Inc.  
100 Paula Drive  
Pineville, KY 40977  
[rlbrock8@bellsouth.net](mailto:rlbrock8@bellsouth.net)**

**Melanie Garris  
Office of Civil Penalty Compliance  
MSHA  
U.S. Dept of Labor  
201 12<sup>th</sup> Street South, Suite 500  
Arlington, VA 22202-5450**

**W. Christian Schumann, Esq.  
Office of the Solicitor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
201 12th Street, Suite 500  
Arlington, VA 22202-5450**

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