

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., N.W., SUITE 520N
WASHINGTON, DC 20004-1710

June 27, 2023

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. KENT 2022-0102
v.	:	A.C. No. 15-19374-554932
	:	
RIVER VIEW COAL, LLC	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chair; Althen, Rajkovich, and Baker, Commissioners

ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION:

This matter arises under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. (2018) (“Mine Act”). On July 21, 2022, the Commission received from River View Coal, LLC (“River View”) 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).

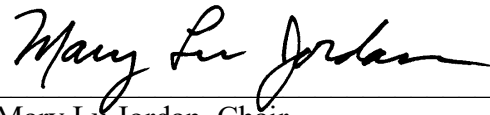
Under section 105(a) of the Mine Act, an operator who wishes to contest a proposed penalty must notify the Secretary of Labor no later than 30 days after receiving the proposed penalty assessment. If the operator fails to notify the Secretary, the proposed penalty assessment is deemed a final order of 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).

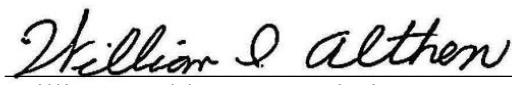
Records of the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on May 23, 2022, and became a final order of the Commission on June 22, 2022. River View asserts that it inadvertently failed to timely file its notice of contest due to personnel changes involving a retirement and subsequent positions and duties being handled by different staff. Specifically, the mine’s safety director asserts that he assumed the duties of contesting proposed assessments shortly after his predecessor retired. However, there was a brief period when the assistant safety director at the mine was covering the role of contesting the assessments. During this period, the assistant safety director miscalculated the deadline for filing the notice of contest, therefore the operator failed to file its contest form in a timely manner.

Despite committing this error, the operator processed and mailed the contest form to MSHA one day after the final order date, on June 23, 2022. On July 15, 2022, the operator received correspondence from MSHA stating that although MSHA had received the contest on June 23, 2022, it was untimely as of June 22, 2022. 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.

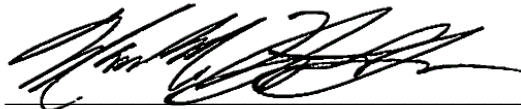
Having reviewed River View’s request and the Secretary’s response, we find that the operator committed an inadvertent mistake due to its personnel changes and subsequent positions and duties being handled by different staff. In the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this matter and remand it to the 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.



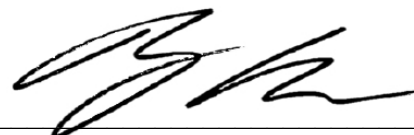
Mary Lu Jordan, Chair



William I. Althen, Commissioner



Marco M. Rajkovich, Jr., Commissioner



Timothy J. Baker, Commissioner

Distribution:

Tyler H. Fields, Esq.
River View Coal, LLC
1146 Monarch Street, Suite 350
Lexington, KY 40513
tyler.fields@arlp.com

April Nelson, Esq.
Associate Solicitor
Office of the Solicitor
U.S. Department of Labor
Division of Mine Safety and Health
201 12th Street South, Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22202
Nelson.April@dol.gov

Emily Toler Scott, Esq.
Counsel for Appellate Litigation
Office of the Solicitor
U.S. Department of Labor
Division of Mine Safety and Health
201 12th Street South, Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22202
scott.emily.t@dol.gov

Melanie Garris
USDOL/MSHA, OAASEI/CPCO
201 12th Street South, Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22202
Garris.Melanie@DOL.GOV

Chief Administrative Law Judge Glynn F. Voisin
Federal Mine Safety Health Review Commission
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 520N
Washington, DC 20004-1710
GVoisin@fmshrc.gov