

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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

August 12, 2024

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. WEST 2023-0240
v.	:	A.C. No. 04-00036-573596
	:	
CALPORTLAND	:	
	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chair; Althen, Rajkovich, Baker, and Marvit, 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 May 16, 2023, the Commission received from CalPortland 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 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 April 4, 2023, and became a final order of the Commission on May 4, 2023.

As stated, after receiving a proposed assessment, an operator must contest the proposed assessment with the Secretary of Labor within 30 days. CalPortland asserts that it misinterpreted the 30-day deadline for contests set forth above as 30 “business” days. Therefore, CalPortland failed to take action within the deadline, resulting in the proposed assessment becoming a final order. CalPortland filed a motion to reopen the final order on May 16, 2023, 30 business days after receiving the assessment. The Secretary of Labor does not oppose the request to reopen.

CalPortland filing the motion to reopen on the 30th business day after receiving the assessment is consistent with, and fully supports, its explanation that it was waiting until the 30th business day to take any action regarding the assessment. Furthermore, we note that the motion to reopen was timely filed. The Commission has previously held that “[m]otions to reopen received within 30 days of an operator’s receipt of its first notice from MSHA that it has failed to timely file a notice of contest will be presumptively considered as having been filed within a reasonable amount of time.” *Highland Mining Co.*, 31 FMSHRC 1313, 1316-17 (Nov. 2009). Here, the motion to reopen was filed on May 16, 2023, 12 days after the proposed assessment became a final order. Therefore, the motion to reopen was filed within a reasonable amount of time.

Having reviewed CalPortland’s request and the Secretary’s response, we find that CalPortland demonstrated good cause for its failure to timely respond, and acted in good faith. In the interest of justice, we hereby reopen this matter and remand it to the Chief Administrative

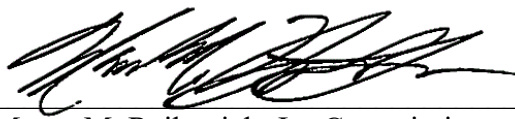
Law Judge for further proceedings pursuant to the Mine Act and the Commission's Procedural Rules, 29 C.F.R. Part 2700. Accordingly, consistent with Rule 28, the Secretary shall file a petition for assessment of penalty within 45 days of the date of this order. See 29 C.F.R. § 2700.28.



Mary Lu Jordan, Chair



William I. Althen, Commissioner



Marco M. Rajkovich, Jr., Commissioner



Timothy J. Baker, Commissioner



Moshe Z. Marvit, Commissioner

Distribution:

John Vernon
Safety Manager
Mojave Cement Plant, CalPortland
9350 Oak Creek Road
Mojave, CA 93501
jvernon@calportland.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
Office of the Chief Administrative Law Judge
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 520N
Washington, DC 20004-1710
GVoisin@fmshrc.gov