

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

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WASHINGTON, DC 20001

July 22, 2010

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	Docket No. LAKE 2010-158-M
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	A.C. No. 33-00125-193422
	:	
v.	:	Docket No. LAKE 2010-159-M
	:	A.C. No. 33-00127-193423
NATIONAL LIME & STONE COMPANY	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Duffy, Young, Cohen, and Nakamura, Commissioners

ORDER

BY THE COMMISSION:

These matters arise under the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq. (2006) (“Mine Act”). On November 17, 2009, the Commission received from National Lime & Stone Company (“National Lime”) letters from its safety compliance officer to reopen two penalty assessments that had become final orders of the Commission pursuant to section 105(a) of the Mine Act, 30 U.S.C. § 815(a).¹ On December 14, 2009, the Commission received a response from the Secretary of Labor stating that she does not oppose the request to reopen the assessment.

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

¹ Pursuant to Commission Procedural Rule 12, on our own motion, we hereby consolidate docket numbers LAKE 2010-158-M and LAKE 2010-159-M, both captioned *National Lime & Stone Company*, and both involving similar procedural issues. 29 C.F.R. § 2700.12.

reopen final section 105(a) orders, the Commission has found guidance in Rule 60(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure under which, for example, a party could be entitled to relief from a final order of the Commission on the basis of mistake, inadvertence, or excusable neglect. *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).

Having reviewed the facts and circumstances of this case, the operator’s request, and the Secretary’s response, 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 F. Duffy, Commissioner

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner

Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner

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