

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

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WASHINGTON, DC 20001

September 28, 2010

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	Docket No. LAKE 2010-501-M
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	A.C. No. 20-01315-203114
	:	
v.	:	Docket No. LAKE 2010-618-M
	:	A.C. No 20-02421-206022
BILL SMITH SAND AND GRAVEL	:	
	:	

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”).¹ On March 9, 2010, and April 1, 2010, the Commission received from Bill Smith Sand & Gravel requests 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). On March 25, 2010, and April 16, 2010, the Commission received responses from the Secretary of Labor stating that she does not oppose the requests to reopen the assessments.

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 section 105(a) orders, the Commission has found guidance in Rule 60(b) of the

¹ Pursuant to Commission Procedural Rule 12, on our own motion, we hereby consolidate docket numbers LAKE 2010-501-M and LAKE 2010-618-M, both captioned *Bill Smith Sand & Gravel* and both involving similar procedural issues. 29 C.F.R. § 2700.12.

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 these cases, the operator’s requests, and the Secretary’s responses, we hereby reopen these matters and remand them 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 petitions 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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