

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

SUITE 9500

WASHINGTON, DC 20001

January 6, 2011

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. VA 2011-63
v.	:	A.C. No. 44-06947-230981
	:	
KEOKEE MINING LLC	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Duffy, Young, Cohen, and Nakamura, 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. (2006) (“Mine Act”). On October 25, 2010, the Commission received a motion by Keokee Mining LLC (“Keokee”) 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). On November 18, 2010, 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 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, Keokee'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.<sup>1</sup>

---

Mary Lu Jordan, Chairman

---

Michael F. Duffy, Commissioner

---

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

---

Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner

---

Patrick K. Nakamura, Commissioner

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on statements in Keokee's motion, we interpret its request as one to reopen the entire assessment so that it can contest all of the proposed penalties. If that is not Keokee's intention, to save the Secretary from having to prepare an overly broad penalty petition, Keokee should immediately contact counsel for the Secretary and identify which penalties it is contesting, and transmit payment for the remaining penalties if it has not already done so.

Distribution:

Michael D. Clements  
Keokee Mining, LLC  
408 Manor Dr.  
Kingsport, TN 37660

W. Christian Schumann, Esq.  
Office of the Solicitor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
1100 Wilson Blvd., Room 2220  
Arlington, VA 22209-2296

Melanie Garris  
Office of Civil Penalty Compliance  
MSHA  
U.S. Dept. of Labor  
1100 Wilson Blvd., 25<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Arlington, VA 22209-3939

Chief Administrative Law Judge Robert J. Lesnick  
Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Commission  
601 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Suite 9500  
Washington, D.C. 20001-2021