

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20001

March 18, 2009

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. WEST 2008-1408-M
v.	:	A.C. No. 35-01066-145141
	:	
SIERRA CASCADE, LLC	:	

BEFORE: Duffy, Chairman; Jordan, Young, and Cohen, 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 August 11, 2008, the Commission received from Sierra Cascade LLC (“Sierra”) a request 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).

The Secretary states that she does not oppose the reopening of the proposed penalty assessment.<sup>1</sup>

We have held, however, that in appropriate circumstances, we possess jurisdiction to

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<sup>1</sup> The record indicates that operator’s counsel called the District Office of the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) after the proposed penalty assessment was issued to determine the status of Sierra’s prior request for a conference and was under the impression that the notice of assessment remained the subject of conferencing and could be revised.

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 Sierra’s request and the Secretary’s response, in the interests 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.

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Michael F. Duffy, Chairman

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Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner

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Michael G. Young, Commissioner

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Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner

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