

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW  
SUITE 9500  
WASHINGTON, DC 20001

May 20, 2009

SECRETARY OF LABOR,  
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH  
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)

v.

ALEX ENERGY, INC.

:  
:  
:  
:  
:  
:  
:  
:

Docket No. WEVA 2009-662  
A.C. No. 46-08877-170008

BEFORE: Duffy, Chairman; Jordan and Young, Commissioners<sup>1</sup>

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 January 13, 2009, the Commission received from Alex Energy, Inc. (“Alex Energy”) a motion from counsel 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).

However, 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 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to section 113(c) of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, 30 U.S.C. § 823(c), the Commission has delegated the power to rule on this reopening request to a three-member panel.

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).

The record indicates that the contest form was sent late because the operator’s standard procedure for handling proposed penalty assessments was not followed during a key employee’s absence. Upon learning of the delinquency, the operator promptly filed its Motion to Reopen Penalty Assessment. The Secretary states that she does not oppose the reopening of the proposed penalty assessment.

Having reviewed Alex Energy’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.

---

Michael F. Duffy, Chairman

---

Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner

---

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Distribution:

Max L. Corley, III, Esq.  
Dinsmore & Shohl, LLP  
P. O. Box 11887  
900 Lee Street, Suite 600  
Charleston, WV 25339

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

Myra James, Chief  
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