

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

SUITE 9500

WASHINGTON, DC 20001

March 1, 2005

SECRETARY OF LABOR, :  
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH :  
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA) :  
 :  
v. : Docket No. CENT 2005-18-M  
 : A.C. No. 39-01393-37543  
 :  
MICHAEL JOHNSON CONSTRUCTION :

BEFORE: Duffy, Chairman; Jordan, Suboleski, and Young, 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. (2000) (“Mine Act”). On November 3, 2004, the Commission received from Michael Johnson Construction (“MJC”) a letter requesting that the Commission 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).

On September 14, 2004, the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) issued a proposed penalty assessment (A.C. No. 39-01393-37543) to MJC’s West Pit in Lake, South Dakota. In its request, MJC states that, upon receipt of the proposed assessment, it was misfiled and not located until October 28, 2004. Letter at 1. MJC further states that it does not dispute the citation, however, the “amount of the proposed penalty seems exorbitant” and it would create a financial burden on the company. *Id.* A copy of the proposed assessment is attached to MJC’s request to reopen. MJC did not provide any other supporting documentation. The Secretary states that she does not oppose MJC’s request for relief.

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 inadvertence or mistake. *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 MJC’s request, in the interests of justice, we remand this matter to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for a determination of whether good cause exists for MJC’s failure to timely contest the penalty proposal and whether relief from the final order should be granted. If it is determined that such relief is appropriate, this case shall proceed pursuant to the Mine Act and the Commission’s Procedural Rules, 29 C.F.R. Part 2700.

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Michael F. Duffy, Chairman

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Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner

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Stanley C. Suboleski, Commissioner

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Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Distribution

Kathy Archer, Assistant to President  
Michael Johnson Construction  
1000 N. Union Ave.  
Madison, SD 57042

W. Christian Schumann, Esq.  
Office of the Solicitor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
1100 Wilson Blvd., 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Arlington, VA 22209

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