

**FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION**

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

SUITE 9500

WASHINGTON, DC 20001

December 16, 2005

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

v.

R&D COAL COMPANY, INC.

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Docket No. PENN 2006-36  
A.C. No. 36-02053-66821

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 December 7, 2005, the Commission received from R&D Coal Company, Inc. (“R&D”) a motion made by counsel 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).

On September 9, 2005, the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) issued a proposed penalty assessment to R&D. Mot. at Ex. A. In its motion, R&D states that on September 16, 2005, it timely contested the proposed penalties. *Id.* at 1; Aff of D. Himmelberger. The company subsequently discovered that MSHA apparently had not received its contest when the assessed amount of penalty it had attempted to contest was shown on an unrelated proposed assessment form as an outstanding balance. Mot. at 1-2. R&D states that it had fully intended to contest the proposed penalty. *Id.* at 2. The Secretary states that she does not oppose R&D’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 R&D’s motion, in the interests of justice, we remand this matter to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for a determination of whether good cause exists for R&D’s apparent 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, these cases 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

Adele L. Abrams, Esq.  
Law Office of Adele L. Abrams, P.C.  
4740 Corridor Place, Suite D  
Beltsville, MD 20705

W. Christian Schumann, Esq.  
Office of the Solicitor  
U.S. Department of Labor  
1100 Wilson Blvd., 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Arlington, VA 22209-2296

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