

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

SUITE 9500

WASHINGTON, DC 20001

December 26, 2007

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	Docket No. WEVA 2008-78
	:	A.C. No. 46-06051-120049
v.	:	
	:	
MAMMOTH COAL COMPANY	:	

BEFORE: Duffy, Chairman; Jordan 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 October 23, 2007, the Commission received from Mammoth Coal Company (“Mammoth”) a motion 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).

On June 12, 2007, the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) issued a proposed penalty assessment to Mammoth covering a number of citations including Citation No. 7254427. In its motion, Mammoth states that its administrative personnel misplaced the proposed penalty assessment form and, as a result, mistakenly failed to fill out the form to contest the penalty for Citation No. 7254427. Mammoth further asserts that it learned of its mistake upon receiving a delinquency letter from MSHA. In response, the Secretary states that she does not oppose Mammoth’s request to reopen the proposed penalty assessment proceeding.

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 Mammoth’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 Mammoth’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.

Michael F. Duffy, Chairman

Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Distribution:

Justin A. Rubenstein, Esq.
Dinsmore & Shohl, LLP
215 Don Knotts Blvd., Suite 310
Morgantown, WV 26501

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. Department of Labor
1100 Wilson Blvd., 25th Floor
Arlington, VA 22209-3939

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