

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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June 3, 2004

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	Docket No. YORK 2004-38-M
	:	A.C. No. 30-01295-03040
	:	
v.	:	
	:	
CAHILL INDUSTRIES CORPORATION	:	

BEFORE: Duffy, Chairman; Beatty, 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. (1994) (“Mine Act”). On April 2, 2004, the Commission received from Cahill Industries Corporation (“Cahill”) correspondence which we construe as a motion 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 July 11, 2003, the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) issued a proposed assessment (A.C. No. 30-01295-03040) to Cahill. In its motion, Cahill stated that it challenges the citations contained in the assessment and wishes to appeal them. Mot. No documentation was attached to Cahill’s motion. The Commission received a response from the Secretary of Labor stating that, because Cahill had identified no grounds for reopening the penalty assessments, she required additional information before she could express her position on the operator’s motion. Sec’y Resp. at 1-2. Cahill subsequently submitted an affidavit from its President, stating that he believed the inspection was a “safety audit” and that MSHA officials confirmed that any citations immediately abated would not result in financial penalties. Aff. of Anthony B. Cahill, Jr. at 1-2.

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).

Cahill has not adequately explained why it failed to timely contest the proposed assessment. On the basis of the present record, we are unable to evaluate the merits of Cahill's position. We hereby remand this matter to the Chief Administrative Law Judge for a determination of whether good cause exists for Cahill'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

Robert H. Beatty, Jr., Commissioner

Mary Lu Jordan, Commissioner

Stanley C. Suboleski, Commissioner

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Distribution

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