

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

1331 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, SUITE 520N

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004-1710

OCT 21 2014

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

v.

BENTON COUNTY STONE COMPANY,
INC.

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Docket No. CENT 2013-675-M
A.C. No. 03-01730-321084

BEFORE: Nakamura, Acting Chairman; Cohen and Althen, 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. (2012) (“Mine Act”). On August 22, 2013, the Commission received from Benton County Stone Company, Inc. (“Benton”) a motion seeking to reopen two citations within 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).

We have held, however, 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 orders, the Commission has found guidance in Rule 60(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, under which the Commission may relieve a party from a final order of the Commission on the basis of mistake, inadvertence, excusable neglect, or other reason justifying relief. *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).

Records of the Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration ("MSHA") indicate that the proposed assessment was delivered on May 14, 2013, and became a final order of the Commission on June 13, 2013. Benton asserts that it mailed a contest to the payment center, and encloses a fax copy dated June 7, 2013. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen, and notes that the MSHA St. Louis, MO, payment center, received a payment for the uncontested penalties, by check dated June 11, 2013. MSHA mailed a delinquency notice on July 29, 2013, and received payment for the contested penalties by check dated August 13, 2013. The Secretary urges the operator to take steps to ensure that future penalty contests are timely filed and mailed to the Civil Penalty Compliance Office in Arlington, VA.

Having reviewed Benton's request and the Secretary's response, in the interest of justice, we hereby reopen Citation Nos. 8688645 and 8688646 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.



Patrick K. Nakamura, Acting Chairman



Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner



William I. Althen, Commissioner

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