

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

601 NEW JERSEY AVENUE, NW

SUITE 9500

WASHINGTON, DC 20001

April 26, 2010

SECRETARY OF LABOR,	:	
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH	:	
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA)	:	
	:	Docket No. WEVA 2009-1892
v.	:	A.C. No. 46-01437-186238 Q180
	:	
A.I.M., LLC	:	

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Duffy, Young, and Cohen, 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. (2006) (“Mine Act”). On August 31, 2009, the Commission received from A.I.M., LLC (“AIM”) a letter 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).

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 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 mistake, inadvertence, or excusable neglect. *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).

On May 28, 2009, the Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration (“MSHA”) issued the proposed assessment at issue. AIM claims that it received the assessment but that its clerk, who had serious health problems, failed to inform anyone that the proposed assessment had been delivered. The company director asserts that he did not learn of the proposed assessment until AIM received a delinquency notice dated August 26, 2009. The request to reopen was filed within one week of the receipt of the delinquency notice.

The Secretary initially opposed the operator’s request. On September 29, 2010, AIM filed a supplementary letter addressing the Secretary’s concerns and more fully explaining the reasons for its failure to timely contest the proposed assessment. On October 1, 2010, the Secretary withdrew her earlier opposition to the request to reopen.

Having reviewed AIM’s request and the Secretary’s responses, in the interests of justice, we hereby reopen this matter 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.

Mary Lu Jordan, Chairman

Michael F. Duffy, Commissioner

Michael G. Young, Commissioner

Robert F. Cohen, Jr., Commissioner

Distribution:

Hoya Clemons
A.I. M., LLC
56000 Dilles Bottom,
Shadyside, OH 43947

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

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