

FEDERAL MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW COMMISSION

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DEC 30 2015

SECRETARY OF LABOR, :
MINE SAFETY AND HEALTH :
ADMINISTRATION (MSHA) :
 :
 :
 : Docket No. WEST 2015-82-M
v. : A.C. No. 04-05276-356398
 :
C. R. BRIGGS :

BEFORE: Jordan, Chairman; Young and Althen, Commissioners¹

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 October 23, 2014, the Commission received from C. R. Briggs (“Briggs”) 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).

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

¹ This case has been delegated to a panel of three Commissioners pursuant to section 113(c) of the Mine Act for the limited purpose of assessing the merits of the motion to reopen. 30 U.S.C. § 823(c).

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") demonstrate that the proposed assessment was delivered on July 22, 2014, and became a final order of the Commission on August 21, 2014. The operator asserts its failure to timely contest the proposed assessment arose out of an internal processing error, and that it intended to contest all unpaid citations. The operator offers letters to establish that it submitted a partial payment to MSHA's payment office in St. Louis, MO. In addition, it appears that the contest form was also submitted to the same address. The operator claims that it has since made improvements to its internal procedures. The Secretary does not oppose the request to reopen. However, he notes that the address for the St. Louis payment office is the incorrect address for submitting contest forms. The Secretary urges Briggs to ensure that contests to future penalty assessments are mailed to the appropriate address in a timely manner.

Having reviewed Briggs's request and the Secretary's response, in the interest 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 G. Young, Commissioner



William I. Althen, Commissioner

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