Mine Disputes Allegations of Safety Violations

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RENO, Nev. (AP) — A northern Nevada gold mine is challenging federal regulators after being cited for alleged safety violations.

Yukon-Nevada Gold Corp. officials dispute the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration's position that the citations issued to its Jerritt Canyon Mill in Elko County concern "significant and substantial" violations that could result in serious injury or illness.

"We have initiated discussions with MSHA to resolve each of these citations and intend to appeal all that cannot be resolved appropriately through these discussions," the Vancouver, British Columbia-based company said in a statement.

MSHA issued six citations to the mine following a special October "impact" inspection that targeted mines nationwide with a poor compliance history, and 30 citations following a routine annual inspection that ended Nov. 7.

Among other things, the mine was cited for violating regulations requiring the proper disposal and storage of combustible waste, the barricading or posting of unsafe areas with warning signs, and the protection of employees from moving machine parts.

The mine is operated by Queenstake Resources USA, a subsidiary of Yukon-Nevada.

Yukon-Nevada officials said they have made "significant strides" improving Jerritt Canyon in terms of safety and productivity, and have already spent over $200 million in improvements.

MSHA conducted the October impact inspections based on a two-year history of the operation, they added.

"During that time significant changes in management and operating procedures have taken place and we believe that we have a very safe operation," the company's statement says. "Historically, Jerritt Canyon boasts zero fatalities in the 30 years of operating and we continue to pursue a goal of zero accidents."

Jerritt Canyon was the only Nevada mine included in the special October inspection of 11 mines nationwide, including eight coal mines.

MSHA's impact inspections began in April 2010 after 29 men died in an explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia.

Last month, MSHA investigators said managers of Barrick Goldstrike's Meikle Mine in Carlin were responsible for an August 2010 accident that killed two employees.

Daniel Noel, 47, and Joel "Ethan" Schorr, 38, both of Spring Creek, were struck by a pipe that gave way in a ventilation shaft because it was clogged with excessive waste rock material.

The agency blamed managers for failing to ensure the safe operation, inspection and maintenance of the mine.

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