

Coal Mine Hit with Numerous Safety Violations

CASPER, Wyo. (AP) — Federal mining regulators hit a southwestern Wyoming coal mine with more than two dozen safety violations this week, ranging from the lack of an updated mine map to hydrants with low water pressure.

Owners of the Jim Bridger Coal Mine east of Rock Springs have vowed to fight at least one of the charges. The U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration said the mine has stopped production while safety changes are made.

The Casper Star-Tribune reports that the violations stem from an August inspection (<http://bit.ly/V3GxvG> [1]). Other safety allegations included an escape line dangling too high for all workers to reach and a segment of roof that wasn't properly supported.

The agency found that the company failed to properly examine and report a conveyor belt to which damage was "extensive and obvious and should have been noticed by any prudent examiner," according to the citation notice. The agency also issued what's known as an order regarding the conveyor, which means it found the company's actions were worse than ordinary neglect.

PacifiCorp, the mine's majority owner, said it will challenge the MSHA over some of its findings. Company spokesman Jeff Hymas did not elaborate on what exactly the company would challenge.

"The health and safety of our employees is of highest importance," the company statement said. "We are continually working to improve our programs and procedures in place to help ensure compliance with MSHA regulations and the well-being of our employees."

The mine operator chose to stop production while changes are made "to permit all conditions to be corrected" before restarting, said MSHA spokeswoman Amy Louviere in an email to the Star-Tribune.

The citations are part of a nationwide mine safety sweep.

The agency began monthly surprise inspections in April 2010 after an explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia killed 29 miners. The agency has since routinely inspected mines it said "merit increased agency attention and enforcement due to their poor compliance history or particular compliance concerns."

MSHA has conducted 492 inspections and handed out 8,800 citations in just more than two years of increased activity. The agency can target a mine for high

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numbers of violations or closures, frequent complaints, frequent injuries or other conditions.

Bridger Coal Co., which operates the mine, is a joint venture between Pacific Minerals, a wholly-owned subsidiary of PacifiCorp, and Idaho Energy Resources Co., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Idaho Power. PacifiCorp holds a two-thirds share in the project.

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[1] <http://bit.ly/V3GxvG>