

# Major Safety Issues At NV Gold Mine

SCOTT SONNER, Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — An assistant U.S. secretary of labor has criticized a Nevada gold mine for failing to protect its workers after federal inspectors issued more than 60 citations and orders involving health and safety violations subject to more than \$200,000 in potential penalties.

A review issued Wednesday noted that Veris Gold USA Inc., owner and operator of the Jerritt Canyon mine in Elko County, didn't have to report an electrical explosion and fire that injured two employees there on Dec. 19 because inspectors for the Mining Safety and Health Administration were already on site documenting infractions.

The violations included blocked emergency escape routes, faulty pressure relief valves and improperly stored hazardous chemicals at the operation that has 120 workers about 50 miles north of Elko, the mining administration said.

Joseph Main, assistant labor secretary for mine safety and health, said the Nevada mine and Hanover Resources LLC's Caymus Mine in West Virginia were among 13 mines in the nation that received a total of 135 citations and 24 orders resulting from inspections in December.

"These two examples clearly indicate that some mine operators still don't get it," Main said in a statement. "They simply failed to comply with the Mine Act, and find and fix hazards to protect miners from injury, illness and death."

Jerritt Canyon received 49 citations and 12 safety orders, according to the inspection report first detailed by the Elko Daily Free Press.

The mining administration has proposed Jerritt Canyon pay nearly \$234,000 in penalties for violations cited in 2013, but several of the problems cited in December have not yet been assessed for penalties and all proposed fines are subject to negotiation.

Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere said Friday she was checking but didn't have an immediate estimate on the total potential fines stemming directly from the December inspections.

Since Canada-based Veris Gold took over operations at the mine in 2003, the mining administration has proposed \$2.2 million in fines, of which Veris Gold has paid about \$1.3 million, according to agency records.

Veris Gold Vice President Joanne Jobin said Friday that Jerritt Canyon has an exemplary safety record with no fatalities since it began operating in 1982. She said

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that as of Jan. 16, all citations and actions have been either acknowledged or met.

"Jerritt Canyon takes all citations and actions from MSHA seriously and its management has been working with them diligently to review all claims," she said in an email to The Associated Press.

The company recently initiated a new safety enhancement program under the personal responsibility of Graham Dickson, the company's chief operating officer, Jobin said.

The two workers were injured on Dec. 16 after an arc flash and a minor fire occurred while an electrician was working on a 480-volt switch gear that was still fully powered, the mining administration reported.

Among other things, inspectors reported finding chemical containers improperly labeled and stored, including spent mercury containers; missing electrical cover plates on energized outlets; an improperly grounded cable; and air receiver tanks equipped with the wrong size pressure relief valves, "creating the potential hazard of an exploding vessel."

The inspectors said there was "no provision for safe access in several locations," including one where nearly four feet of dirt had accumulated on the side of a conveyor belt, blocking access to steps and a catwalk used to reach the plant.

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