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PROGRAM POLICY LETTER NO. P11-V-08

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SUBJECT: Tests for Methane at the Working Face, Using Extendable
Probes or Other Acceptable Means

Scope

This Program Policy Letter (PPL) is intended for Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) personnel, equipment manufacturers, underground coal mine operators and independent contractors, miners and miners' representatives, and other interested parties.

Purpose

This PPL clarifies the requirements concerning tests for methane under 30 C.F.R. § 75.362(d)(1), (d)(2), and (d)(3). This PPL sets forth MSHA's policy for determining the manner and means of testing for methane at the working face including during roof bolting.

Policy

During on-shift examinations, tests for methane are required to be made, under 30 C.F.R. § 75.362(d)(1), as follows: (1) at the start of each shift at each working place before electrically operated equipment is energized; (2) immediately before equipment is energized, taken into, or operated in a working place; and, (3) at 20-minute intervals, or more often if required in the approved ventilation plan, during the operation of equipment in the working place. These methane tests are required to be made at the face from under permanent roof support, using extendable probes or other acceptable means.

In order to provide the intended protection of the standard, the extendable probe or other acceptable means to test for methane should be within 5 feet of the face and at least 12 inches from the roof, face, ribs, and floor. Other acceptable means of testing

may include use of the “gizmo” device, whereby a methane detector is held by the device, which is attached to the head of the continuous mining machine, and the machine is then trammed to the face to test for methane. Other similar devices, such as the use of cases or machine-mounted enclosures that hold the methane detector, also are acceptable methods for taking a methane test at the face, but testing should be within 5 feet of the face and at least 12 inches from the roof, face, ribs and floor. The qualified person making the test must be able to accurately determine the quantity of methane at the face.

As an alternative during roof bolting, methane tests may be made, under 30 C.F.R. § 75.362(d)(3), by sweeping an area not less than 16 feet in by the last area of permanently supported roof, using a probe or other acceptable means and conditioned on meeting the additional requirements in 30 C.F.R. § 75.362(d)(3). However, the initial test for methane before the roof bolting machine is taken into the working place must be made at the face from under permanent roof support, using extendable probes or other acceptable means. If a test for methane at the face was conducted within the preceding 20 minutes while the continuous mining machine was in the working place, the test made for the continuous mining machine will suffice for the required test at the face prior to the roof bolting machine entering the working place, unless more frequent testing for the specific location is required in the approved ventilation plan. If more than 20 minutes has elapsed since the last test for methane at the face was conducted, a test for methane at the face is required prior to the roof bolting machine entering the working place.

Background

MSHA has historically accepted methane tests at the face while using extendable probes, under 30 C.F.R. §§ 75.362(d)(1), (d)(2) and (d)(3), if the probe reaches within 5 feet of the face and no closer than 12 inches to the roof, ribs, and floor.

Authority

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977, as amended, 30 U.S.C. § 801 et seq.; 30 C.F.R. §§ 75.362(d)(1), (d)(2) and (d)(3).

Issuing Office and Contact Person

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Internet Availability

This policy letter may be viewed on the Internet by accessing MSHA's home page at (<http://www.msha.gov>) and choosing "Compliance Info" and "Program Policy Letters."

Distribution

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