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E-News week of June 21, 1996

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1. Mining company officials sentenced to prison terms

Three officials of the Pyro Mining Company were sentenced to prison June 12, concluding the largest Mine Safety and Health Administration criminal case in history, MSHA announced jointly with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Department of Justice last week. Fourteen mining company officials pleaded guilty to various charges including making false statements to MSHA, obstructing justice and violating safety standards, following a June 1989 explosion that killed ten workers at Pyro's William Station Mine in Wheatcroft, Kentucky. The last three of the fourteen officials prosecuted in the case are Mine Superintendent Michael McDowell, General Superintendent David Steele, and Foreman Russell Faulk. Steele's sentence to 18 months incarceration is one of the most severe penalties ever delivered in an MSHA case. McDowell and Faulk were sentenced to 6 and 5 month terms, respectively. The eleven other defendants received home incarceration and probation sentences.

2. OSHA issues carbon dioxide-handling safety warnings

Following the death of a Midwest delivery driver who was overcome as he dispensed carbon dioxide through a hose from his tractor trailer to a restaurant's carbonated beverage system, OSHA this week issued safety warnings for handling CO₂. Asphyxiation can occur when carbon dioxide leaks into unventilated work areas. OSHA recommends these precautions: * Inspect and maintain all piping tubing, hoses and fittings at regular intervals and maintain the system in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

- o Make sure there is adequate ventilation even when carbon dioxide is delivered in enclosed areas or below grade locations that are not confined spaces.
- o Develop and implement procedures to monitor the atmosphere for CO₂ and provide local ventilation where levels may exceed the permissible exposure limit.
- o Place appropriate warning signs outside areas where high concentrations of carbon dioxide might accumulate.
- o Provide proper lighting to enable workers to work safely.
- o Install new carbon dioxide receptacles at ground level in an open areas. If possible, relocate existing fill stations to above-grade locations. When relocation is not feasible employers should follow the requirements of OSHA's permit-required confined space standard. The Compressed Gas Association at 703-979-0900 offers more information for individuals handling carbon dioxide.

3. NIOSH suggests measures for reducing crystalline silica dust exposure in construction

NIOSH issued an advisory this month for reducing crystalline silica dust exposure in the construction industry. The dust when inhaled and embedded in the lung, can cause the serious and potentially fatal respiratory disease, silicosis. Construction workers can become exposed when chipping, hammering, drilling, crushing or hauling rock or concrete and masonry products that contain silica. Even materials containing small amounts of crystalline silica may be hazardous if used in ways that produce high dust concentrations, according to NIOSH. NIOSH's recommendations for reducing crystalline silica dust