

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: Jerry Burkot
202-225-3452

Rahall Subcommittee Prioritizes Miner Safety

Washington, D.C. -- Fourth District Rep. Nick Rahall's Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources today recommended to the Budget Committee that federal efforts to ensure a safer and healthier working environment for coal miners should take priority over other programs under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction. The Subcommittee was making its fiscal year 1987 budget recommendations after examining the Reagan Administration's proposed budget for the Bureau of Mines and other Interior Department agencies.

"The Subcommittee recognizes the drastic constraints being imposed on federal spending. Under such circumstances, the Subcommittee finds that activities of the Bureau of Mines concerning the health and safety of the Nation's mining workforce, increased efficiencies and productivity in coal and mineral extraction and the mitigation of adverse environmental effects of mining should, and must, take priority over all other Bureau programs," the Rahall-drafted Subcommittee report stated.

Citing the fact that the leading cause of miner fatalities continues to be due to roof and wall falls in underground coal mines and that over one-half million miners suffer from the crippling effects of black lung disease, the Subcommittee recommended increased funding for Bureau efforts to mitigate mountain bumps and respirable dust levels. The Bureau of Mines is currently conducting research on mountain bumps -- a phenomena that causes a sudden collapse of mine roofs and walls at certain stress points due to ground pressures -- at the Olga Mine in McDowell County and is providing grant monies to West Virginia University to conduct research on black lung disease at its Generic Center for Respirable Dust.

Also in the area of health and safety technology research, the Subcommittee charged the Bureau of Mines with developing a lighter weight and smaller self-contained-self-rescuer unit that would be wearable on a miner's belt.

The Subcommittee report noted that acid mine drainage largely from abandoned underground coal mines continues to threaten the integrity of over 5,000 miles of streams and rivers in the Appalachian Region and that land subsidence may affect over 8 million acres, an area one-half the size of West Virginia. Increased funding was recommended for Bureau programs to address these environmental problems.

"I believe the recommendations made by my Subcommittee are prudent in light of today's budgetary constraints," the West Virginia Democrat noted. "Despite the increases in funding we proposed for certain programs, our total recommendations are still below the current year level of funding for the programs under our jurisdiction."

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