

News
From _____

CONGRESSMAN

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SELF-RESCUERS TOP PRIORITY,

RAHALL TELLS BUREAU OF MINES

Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today charged that the ability of the nation's underground coal miners to survive during emergency situations is being seriously undermined due to the presence of flawed rescuer units in the mines.

In a recent investigative report, the U.S. Bureau of Mines, in evaluating self-contained self-rescuer (SCSR) units taken from underground coal mines, found that many were damaged or made useless due to design deficiencies despite having been inspected on a daily basis. Federal mine health and safety regulations require that each underground coal miner have access to a self-rescuer unit that has an oxygen source.

"In my view, the current SCSR design, regardless of the manufacturer, cannot be depended upon to adequately meet the safety needs of the nation's coal miners in emergency situations," Rahall wrote to the director of the U.S. Bureau of Mines. "While I support the Bureau's recommendation that improved training in SCSR unit inspection procedures will mitigate some of the damage found, this should only be viewed as an interim measure."

Rahall, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources which has legislative jurisdiction over health and safety mining technology matters, strongly urged the Bureau to increase efforts to develop a new generation of smaller and lighter SCSR units than those currently on the market. Chairman Rahall noted that his subcommittee has also made this recommendation which has been reflected in the agency's annual appropriations from the Congress.

"We can put a man on the moon, we have made giant strides in medicine and technology, yet when it comes to mine safety technology we are stranded in the Dark Ages," Rahall argued. "I see no reason why we cannot come up with an efficient, lightweight oxygen unit that a miner can strap on his belt and have available in case of an emergency."

"This must become the research priority for the Bureau of Mines so that underground coal miners will be better equipped to survive in the event of a mine mishap," Rahall added. He noted that complaints with the current rescuers are often brought to his attention by rank-and-file miners during his visits to underground coal mines.

RAHALL TELLS BUREAU OF MINES NEW SELF-RESCUERS MUST BE DEVELOPED

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