

# United Mine Workers of America

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February 12, 2019

Mr. Howard Berkes, Correspondent  
National Public Radio  
1111 North Capitol St, NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Burkes,

On January 22, 2019, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting aired a documentary regarding the recent surge in the occurrence of Pneumoconiosis (Black Lung Disease) in the Nation's coalfields. The investigative report, *Coal's Deadly Dust*, produced by National Public Radio and Frontline was, for the most part, insightful. In fact, much of the content with regard to the regulatory failure that permitted the resurgence of this horrible disease was factual and correct.

However, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) takes exception to a specific statement by one of the people you interviewed for your story. You included a sound bite from Ms. Celeste Monforton, DrPH, MPH, in which she incorrectly stated the Union's position regarding regulatory action necessary to curtail coal mine dust, including quartz and silica.

Ms. Monforton specifically stated, "There was a lot of resistance, both in the mining industry and I think also from the Mine Workers Union, about what they would call the complexity of really doing both a coal mine dust standard and a silica standard. Now we see in miners, who were again working at that period of time and now, are the ones that are seriously ill from the disease."

This statement is false, at least with respect to the UMWA's historical position on this issue. The UMWA has never played a role in squashing or delaying attempts by the Agency to promulgate a silica standard in coal mines, either during her tenure at the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) or at any other time.

My first reaction to Ms. Monforton's remarks was one of dismay. One would think with all her experience at MSHA that she is well aware of the UMWA's involvement in discussions regarding regulatory actions aimed at protecting the health of the Nation's miners. The UMWA has been and remains the leading advocate for coal miners' health and safety in the United States and Canada for over 129 years – whether those miners are members of our union or not. In truth, we are the only line of defense for miners subjected to the harsh and dangerous conditions of the industry. This reality makes her statements all the more difficult to reconcile with the facts.

During the time period noted in your reporting and to the present day, the UMWA has been deeply engaged in attempts to control coal mine dust, including quartz and silica in an effort to eliminate the hazards miners face regarding this matter. The Union has always forcefully argued that exposure to silica, quartz and all other coal mine dust must be controlled through all environmental and technological means available if we are to successfully eradicate Pneumoconiosis. The Union's position regarding this extremely important issue has never changed. Anyone who would argue otherwise is simply inaccurately representing the facts.

Considering the impact of Ms. Monforton's statements, including the veiled suggestion that miners' illnesses are, at least partially the result of the Union's inaction, and the fact that this incorrect information will remain in the public domain, I must strongly request that such inaccuracies be corrected. Having brought this erroneous information to your attention, we believe it is incumbent upon you, National Public Radio, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and any other media outlet that may be airing this program to immediately correct the record.

Should you need additional information or seek clarification on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me at the United Mine Workers of America Headquarters at (703) 291-2400.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cecil E. Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cecil E. Roberts