

# United Mine Workers of America

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SENT VIA E-MAIL: [Zatezalo.david@dol.gov](mailto:Zatezalo.david@dol.gov)

Mr. David G. Zatezalo, Assistant Secretary  
Mine Safety and Health Administration  
Room 5C330  
201 12th Street South  
Arlington, VA 22202-5452

Dear Mr. Zatezalo:

I am writing to inquire about what specific actions the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) is taking to protect miners from the COVID-19 pandemic. The current COVID-19 outbreak is unlike any health and safety situation we have ever witnessed before. It has brought with it many new, demanding challenges in keeping our miners and their work environment safe. While these are certainly difficult times for all workers, it is especially challenging for workers who are unable to work from home and have valid concerns about their health and safety and that of their loved ones.

There are many resources available that can provide workers the best precautions available at this time to follow to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. MSHA's website points to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) website for their guidance. However, just like the virus we are all trying to protect ourselves from, mining is unique and nothing like the workplaces governed by OSHA. Our miners work in close proximity to one another from the time they arrive at the mine site. They get dressed, travel down the elevator together, ride in the same man trip, work in confined spaces, breathe the same air, operate the same equipment, and use the same shower facilities.

On top of the many challenges miners face at, and in the workplace, many miners are also older and suffer from various underlying health conditions such as pneumoconiosis, which the UMWA believes will greatly exacerbate the severity of the symptoms related to COVID - 19; heart disease - a condition that in itself suppresses the immune response leaving the afflicted more susceptible to harmful pathogens; and compromised immune systems. These miners are considered "high risk" and are often located in rural areas that do not provide the same access to healthcare centers as workers in urban areas. This makes miners one of the most vulnerable populations for the virus.

The UMWA has been able to work with various operators and our Local Unions to create some of our own specific precautionary measures to help protect miners from this extremely contagious virus. Some of these precautionary measures are:

- Additional disinfectant in between shifts for toilets, sinks, showers, boot wash areas, bulletin boards, and lunch areas
- Disinfecting all cap lamps, detectors, radios, and any other equipment used by miners after each shift and before other miners are able to use them
- Providing miners with disinfecting wipes and spray
- Disinfecting all equipment before use
- Providing additional medical gloves (nitrile gloves) for miners to wear in addition to their required work gloves
- Limiting the number of miners traveling down/up the elevator and on mantrips
- Suspend the use of hand scanners

We believe these precautions are a good start and would like to see a homogeneous (uniform) implementation of these common-sense practices. However, these alone are not enough. Mine operators need to ensure that miners have:

- Access to obtain at least N-95 respirators
- Policies and procedures in place for disinfecting equipment between shifts and when changing operators
- Extra PPE available for pulling cables, touching shared equipment, and handling materials that may have been contacted by infected persons
- Bathhouse and gathering place disinfectant strategies

The UMWA believes coal mining can survive this crisis. We also believe American Miners can overcome even the greatest of obstacles in order to continue to provide the raw materials that have allowed the United States of America to become the greatest Nation in the history of mankind.

As you are aware, MSHA has the authority to issue a “safeguard” and/or an “emergency standard” that will mandate Operators to comply and adhere to specific precautionary measures that will provide protections to miners as outlined in this letter. The UMWA strongly recommends that MSHA **immediately** issue said safeguard/emergency standards to protect the most valuable resource in the mine -- the miner. I would also inquire if MSHA has developed additional health and safety recommendations that Operators and miners can implement to better protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus. The UMWA stands ready to work with MSHA, the mining industry, and our members to find ways to protect miners in these unprecedented times. Miners are a resilient people and have overcome many challenges throughout time. This will be yet another situation where we will overcome, protecting our miners, their families, their communities, and allow them to continue to provide these valuable resources when our nation needs them most.

Mr. Josh Roberts, the Administrator of the UMWA’s Department of Occupational Health and Safety, is the UMWA’s liaison in regard to the COVID-19 virus. When responding to this

letter I ask that you please contact Josh. He can be reached at 703-291-2422. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cecil E. Roberts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and a long, sweeping tail.

Cecil E. Roberts

cc: Levi Allen, International Secretary-Treasurer  
Bob Scaramozzino, Executive Assistant to the President  
Tanya James, Executive Assistant to the Secretary-Treasurer  
Josh Roberts, Administrator of Occupational Health and Safety  
Ron Bowersox, Director of Health and Safety Field Operations