

Proposed MSHA Office Closures Threaten Health of Miners and Safety of Mines Across the Country

Higher Toxic Dust Exposure, Workplace Injury, and Fatality Rates Likely as Offices Responsible for 17,000 Inspections Since 2024 Are Shuttered

In March 2025, Appalachian Citizens' Law Center examined a list of nearly 800 proposed lease terminations provided on the [DOGE website](#) to assess how proposed facility closures might affect the safety of miners.¹

The expected closure of at least 33 Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) field offices by the Trump Administration's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) could significantly reduce the number of staff and inspections meant to prevent exposure to toxic dust, mining injuries and fatalities, and mining disasters, according to the findings of new analysis from Appalachian Citizens Law Center (ACLC). Closing these offices will, at a minimum, dramatically limit the ability for inspectors to do their job in a timely way by greatly expanding the territory they must cover from remaining offices. At worst, staff and inspection numbers could be sharply reduced.

ACLC's review of publicly-available data indicates that nearly 17,000 health and safety inspections were conducted from the beginning of 2024 through February 2025 by staff at 33 MSHA offices conducting inspections for which leases have been terminated, according to DOGE.

Claimed to be part of a cost-reduction strategy, the impact of these anticipated closures, combined with an overall decline in MSHA staff capacity, will be felt in every part of coal country, with a likely impact on community safety and miner health.

MSHA inspectors and administrative staff are essential in ensuring mining operations adhere to federal safety standards designed to prevent explosions, collapses, toxic dust exposure, and other accidents and disasters. They inspect equipment, the storage of

¹ List was pulled from <https://doge.gov/savings> on March 18th, 2025; numbers are accurate to information provided by DOGE at that time.

flammable materials, ventilation and fall protection measures, and more. Working in coal, metal and nonmetal mines on the surface or underground, inspectors are charged with maintaining a basic standard of safety for miners working in one of the most dangerous occupations in the world.

Federal law requires MSHA to inspect each underground mine at least four times annually and each surface mine twice. Mines with higher risks, such as those with explosive or toxic gases, require even more frequent inspections. Additionally, inspectors respond to complaints of hazardous working conditions – a vital step in preventing disasters.

The announced closure of these field offices combined with the reduction in inspection staff over the last decade will make these inspections even more difficult to complete. It remains unclear how the Trump Administration will fulfill these legally required inspections, and whether the territory covered by remaining field offices and staff will be dramatically multiplied. Without adequate staff and field office capacity, inspection numbers are likely to drop significantly as remaining resources are stretched to a breaking point, increasing the risk of unsafe mining conditions and disasters.

In Kentucky, for example, the Trump Administration plans to close seven field offices, leaving only two offices in the Commonwealth to inspect more than 280 Kentucky coal mines. Many of these mines are in rural areas that are hours away from the few offices slated to remain open.

For example, over 300 inspections occurred in Harlan County, Kentucky in the time period analyzed. Those inspections were conducted by field offices based in Harlan or Barbourville, Kentucky, a short, 30 minute drive away. If those mines become the responsibility of Pikeville, inspectors will have to make a 3 - 4 hour round trip – likely reducing the number of inspections in a given year if they are able to happen at all.

Analysis by the Appalachian Citizens Law Center found that:

- In 2024 and 2025, 16,639 inspections were conducted by the 33 MSHA field offices set to be shuttered by DOGE. Inspectors in these offices spent over 234,000 hours on site at mines and over 399,000 total hours completing inspection duties.
- Over the past decade, MSHA has seen a 27% reduction in total staff, including 30% of enforcement staff generally and 50% of enforcement staff for coal mines.

Mining is a Dangerous Occupation

The recent death of a mining contractor on February 28 in a West Virginia mining operation underscores the daily dangers miners face. Before the 1969 Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, [hundreds of miners died annually due to workplace hazards](#). Since the passage of the law, mining fatalities have dropped significantly. Weakening enforcement could push the industry back toward that dangerous era.

In the short-term, the reduction of inspections could mean hazards such as gas buildups, unstable mine walls, unhealthy silica and coal dust levels, and faulty equipment may go unnoticed. Mining companies that rely on MSHA guidance and input on their operations could be thrown into confusion while others will cut corners knowing that inspections will be fewer and further between, reducing an already shaky culture of compliance. Longer-term, fatality and injury rates could increase along with the likelihood of preventable disasters and dust exposure that causes black lung disease. With the rate of black lung reaching new highs and younger miners getting sicker than ever before, the reduction of inspections designed to detect unsafe conditions could send the black lung epidemic even further out of control.

The decision to close MSHA field offices could undo decades of progress in workplace safety and black lung prevention – including efforts to enforce the new rule curbing silica dust exposure. It is essential that MSHA has the resources and capacity to do its job and protect the health and safety of miners and prevent mining disasters.

Maintaining a robust and fully staffed MSHA is not just a legal requirement –it is a moral imperative to ensure that miners return home safely at the end of each shift and communities are not put at risk because of negligence, errors, or deadly shortcuts taken by mining operators.

A full list of the locations of MSHA closures and their inspection totals from 2024 to 2025 includes:

Field Office	Total Number of Inspector Hours 2024 - 2025	Number of Completed Inspections 2024-2025
VINCENNES, IN	26693	688
ST. CLAIRSVILLE, OH	24224	777
WAYNESBURG, PA	21548	411
MADISONVILLE, KY	20496	557
HARLAN, KY	19505	364
KNOXVILLE, TN	18061	936
ALBANY, NY	16296	1161
HAZARD, KY	16076	365
STURGIS, KY	15751	168
LITCHFIELD, IL	14456	407
FRACKVILLE, PA	14097	537
BIRMINGHAM, AL	14016	1009
HEBRON, OH	13094	622
ELKO, NV	12822	411
PORTSMOUTH, NH	12697	1146
SAN BERNARDINO, CA	12262	579
GREEN RIVER, WY	11798	597
HIBBING, MN	11303	581
BARBOURVILLE, KY	10906	328
PRESTONSBURG, KY	9891	211
WARRENDALE, PA	9299	452
GENEVA, NY	9047	616
SUMMERSVILLE, WV	9038	232

VACAVILLE, CA	8977	731
SAN ANTONIO, TX	8454	621
RAPID CITY, SD	8280	438
ALBANY, OR	6992	580
MESA, AZ	6752	384
HENDERSON, NV	6171	382
CRAIG, CO	4780	102
LONGVIEW, TX	3527	188
BEAVER DAM, KY	1860	56
MOUNT PLEASANT, PA	119	2

This list was pulled from the [real estate section of this DOGE website](#) on March 18, 2025