

For immediate release
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State Office Approves Shelters for Use in West Virginia Mines

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training today approved five emergency shelters/chambers for use in West Virginia's underground mines. The approval process is a significant step toward incorporating this emergency equipment into the mine safety programs of the state's underground mines and opens the way for mine operators to begin ordering the equipment so that they can meet state and federally mandated deadlines for having the equipment in mines.

"I am pleased at the cooperative efforts that have been made by the Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training and the companies that developed these shelters," said Governor Joe Manchin. "And I believe that this, along with mandated supplies of self-contained self-rescuers and the pending approvals for communications and tracking devices, places West Virginia at the forefront of mine safety programs."

The approval review process for the emergency shelters was completed by an independent team of mine safety professionals at the West Virginia University College of Engineering and Mineral Resources Mine Engineering facilities in Morgantown. Representatives of the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health observed the review process.

"A great deal of work has gone into the approval process for these shelters," said Ron Wooten, director of the Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training. "This office will continue approving emergency shelters that meet West Virginia's requirements as other companies submit them for review."

Wooten credited the mine safety technology task force for its extensive study and review of the requirements for the shelters, noting "their research provided the basis for the criteria the agency used in developing the application and approval processes.

"I applaud the shelter manufacturing community for its dedication of time and financial investments necessary to bring these products to the market," he said. "In a short period of time, these companies have put a great deal of effort into the research and development necessary to bring these shelters to the market and these manufacturers whose products are approved set a high standard for everyone working on mine safety technologies."

Mine operators will receive the information on the approved systems today. They have until April 15, 2007, to submit their shelter plans to the Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training district offices. Criteria for their plans must demonstrate that each active mine will have shelters in place within 1,000 feet of working faces in a crosscut against the inby rib. The shelters are movable since the agency estimates that each shelter will be moved about once a week and that, over a shelter's 10-year life expectancy, it will be moved more than 500 times and travel up to 95 miles within a mine.

On average, there are 150 active underground mines in West Virginia at any time and each mine could have as many as five working sections that would require shelters.

The five shelters approved for use in the mines are products of four companies.

*ChemBio Shelter, Inc.

The LifeShelter is an inflatable shelter that can be scaled to accommodate from 10 to 30 miners and provides 96 hours of life support.

*Draeger Safety Inc.

The Draeger Emergency Shelter is a rigid shelter that comes in 10- and 16-miner models and provides 96 hours of life support.

*Kennedy Metal Products, Inc.

The Kennedy Chamber is a rigid shelter that can be scaled to size for 10 to 33 miners and provides 96 hours of life support.

*Strata Products (USA), Inc.

The Fresh Air Bay is an inflatable shelter that comes in models for 10, 16 or 20 miners and provides 96 hours of life support.

The Coal Mine Refuge Chamber is a rigid shelter that comes in models for 8, 16 or 20 miners and provides 96 hours of life support.

In addition to these shelters, the approval team reviewed a Modern Mine Safety Supply LLC rigid shelter that provides 16 miners with 96 hours of support. The shelter is awaiting Mine Safety and Health Administration approval for the shelter's electrical sub-system.

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Note: The complete text of the shelter reviews is available at the West Virginia Miners' Health, Safety and Training Web site, www.wvminesafety.org.

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