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Who Pays the Price?

Cuts to Mine Safety and Health Programs Under the Trump Administration

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Executive Summary

In August 2026, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) released findings that showed that 32 percent of veteran underground coal miners in Central Appalachia have coal workers' pneumoconiosis—black lung disease. These rates have increased by more than 60 percent compared to when NIOSH last reported on rates of the disease in 2018. Rates of black lung are, in fact, the highest they have been since 1978.

It has been widely documented that as Central Appalachian coal reserves dwindle, miners must cut through more rock to reach thinner seams of coal; it is also well-understood that the dust created by cutting through these highly-toxic, silica-bearing sandstone reserves are escalating risk of extreme health harms to miners. This rapidly mounting crisis is curable—but swift action must be taken.

As the incidence of black lung disease rises, mine safety advocates are constantly calling attention to a troubling lack of action on the federal level.¹ For over 500 days, the Trump administration's approach to coal miner safety and health has been characterized by disinvestment and regulatory rollbacks, particularly initiatives aimed at curbing the black lung epidemic. These actions are in stark contrast to the energetic leadership the Trump administration has shown for bolstering the coal industry more broadly. Further, Congress continues to drag its feet on legislative reforms to improve the black lung benefits system. This report tracks major milestones regarding mine safety and health from January 2025 to August 2026. We describe:

- A lack of enforcement and rollback of a 2024 rule regulating miners' exposure to respirable crystalline silica
- The rollback and lack of enforcement of a 2024 rule regulating the authorization of coal operators that self-insure their black lung liability

¹ Fred Gebhart, "Black Lung Disease Mortality on the Rise, Recent Analysis Shows," CHEST Physician, March 4, 2026, <https://www.chestphysician.org/black-lung-disease-mortality-on-the-rise-recent-analysis-shows/>.

- Mass layoffs at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- Staff reductions at the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission
- Understaffing and funding cuts at the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA)
- Over \$1 billion in investments to support the domestic coal industry²
- The costs of implementing protections and improvements are comparatively small, for example, the Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act would cost just \$7.4 million annually, and the coal industry's implementation costs for the 2024 silica rule were projected as just \$8.2 million annually.
- Bills like the *Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act*, *Relief for Survivors of Miners Act*, and *Support Our Miners Act* that have initiated attempts at reform, but lack bipartisan support

As the report details, the Trump administration has put substantive energy and funding toward expanding the coal industry without taking complementary actions to expand protections for the miners on whom the coal industry depends. Rather, the Trump administration's actions are actively putting coal miners at increased risk of black lung. In addition, legislation aimed at reforming and improving the black lung benefits system remains partisan. Republicans have failed to support or champion necessary changes that coal miners are demanding. This lack of action puts the burden of cost on taxpayers, unions and, of course, the miners themselves.

Last, a rhetorical and investment-oriented focus on coal industry revitalization and reduced health and safety standards ignores calls from the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and others to invest in the short and long-term futures of miners. Coal miners and communities need both protection now and a plan for the future that diversifies the economy and creates family-sustaining livelihoods that will persist long into the future.

² U.S. Department of Energy, "The Energy Department Is Unleashing Beautiful, Clean Coal," <https://www.Energy.Gov/Articles/Fact-Sheet-Energy-Department-Unleashing-Beautiful-Clean-Coal>, February 25, 2026, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/fact-sheet-energy-department-unleashing-beautiful-clean-coal>.

Introduction

In Central Appalachia, 32.5 percent of long-tenured, working miners suffer from black lung, an incurable and often fatal occupational disease caused by excessive inhalation of coal and other dust.³ This epidemic was, and is, preventable. Respirable dust standards initiated by the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 led to a substantial decrease in the occurrence of black lung disease by the late 1990s. However, today's rates of disease have surged to a 50-year high due primarily to overexposure to silica dust, a mineral common in the sandstone rock layers that sandwich the coal seams in Appalachia.⁴

Though it is well-established that limiting coal and silica dust exposure prevents black lung, enacting policies to protect miners' health has been an uphill public health battle for over a century. Since the 1830s, U.S. doctors have observed coal miners coughing up black sputum, struggling to breathe, and suffering from inflamed airways.⁵ However, into the early 20th century, coal workers' black lung symptoms were reductively misdiagnosed as "miner's asthma," and U.S. public health authorities and coal mine operators dismissed dust exposure concerns.⁶ Momentum for a federal mine safety bill did not arrive until the 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster explosion killed 78 miners.⁷ Following the explosion, miners, miners' wives, doctors, and advocates united together to form the Black Lung Association and endorse the passage of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969.⁸

The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act established hundreds of mine safety and health regulations, the Coal Workers' Surveillance Health Program, and the Black Lung Benefits Program. These programs aimed to prevent black lung, eliminate its most severe form, and support patients and their families.⁹ The act laid the groundwork for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), established in 1970, and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), established in 1977. As a result of this landmark mine safety policy, the prevalence of black lung decreased from 30 percent to approximately 5 percent of long-tenured miners by the late 1990s—until the trend suddenly reversed in the early 2000s.¹⁰

Though coal dust regulations have become more restrictive, the resurgence in black lung disease is primarily linked to overexposure to silica dust. Changes in coal mining technology, unsafe working practices, improper dust sampling, working longer hours, operating in smaller mines, and cutting through more silica-rich rock to access narrower coal seams is associated with miners' increased overexposure to silica dust.¹¹ In the Central Appalachian region, it is becoming increasingly common for miners to cut through many feet of rock to reach coal seams as thin as 20 inches or even smaller; miners describe this work as like "sitting in a cloud."¹² This combination of factors has resulted in miners getting more severe forms of black lung at younger ages—many in their 30s and 40s.¹³

3 A. Scott Laney et al., "Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis in the United States 1974–2025: Prevalence in Central Appalachia Continues to Increase," *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, August 4, 2026, aamag401, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajrccm/aamag401>.

4 Laney et al., "Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis in the United States 1974–2025."

5 Alan Derickson, *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

6 Alan Derickson, "'Nuisance Dust': Unprotective Limits for Exposure to Coal Mine Dust in the United States, 1934–1969," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 2 (2013): 238–49, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300932>.

7 Lancianese, "Before Black Lung, The Hawks Nest Tunnel Disaster Killed Hundreds," *Investigations*, NPR, January 20, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/20/685821214/before-black-lung-the-hawks-nest-tunnel-disaster-killed-hundreds>; "Mine Disaster: 1968 Farmington Explosion Anniversary," Mine Health and Safety Administration, accessed August 27, 2026, <https://www.msha.gov/mine-disaster-1968-farmington-explosion-anniversary>.

8 Derickson, *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster*.

9 "Federal Coal Mine and Safety Act of 1969," Mine Health and Safety Administration, accessed August 27, 2026, <https://www.msha.gov/federal-coal-mine-and-safety-act-1969>.

10 David J. Blackley et al., "Resurgence of Progressive Massive Fibrosis in Coal Miners – Eastern Kentucky, 2016," *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 65, no. 49 (2016): 1385–89, <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6549a1>.

11 Yuan Shao et al., "Thin Seams and Small Mines Are Associated with Higher Exposures to Respirable Crystalline Silica in US Underground Coal Mines," *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 81, no. 6 (2024): 308–12, <https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2023-109347>; Aysha A. Bodenhamer, *Outlaw Operators: Prevention Failures and the Resurgence of Black Lung in Central Appalachia* (University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy, 2020), 1–6, <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1412&context=carsey>; Black Lung Kills, "The Crisis Today," Black Lung Kills, accessed August 27, 2026, <https://www.blacklungkills.org/the-crisis-today>.

12 Berkes, Howard. 2018. "An Epidemic Is Killing Thousands Of Coal Miners. Regulators Could Have Stopped It." NPR. December 18, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/18/675253856/an-epidemic-is-killing-thousands-of-coal-miners-regulators-could-have-stopped-it>.

13 Laney et al., "Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis in the United States 1974–2025."

Miners who are disabled by black lung disease are eligible to receive federal black lung benefits. These benefits provide insurance to cover medical costs associated with the disease and provide a monthly disability benefit. To access federal benefits, miners must prove in court that they have debilitating black lung as a consequence of coal mining, and are no longer able to perform what was physically required of them in their coal mining job.¹⁴ However, securing benefits is not easy. It is often an adversarial process in which the coal or insurance companies provide evidence and testimony to rebut the miners' claim. It can take many years for miners to win their claims.¹⁵ In the event that miners or their dependents win access to federal benefits, they are far from a living wage. Because benefits have not been properly inflation-adjusted, if a fully-disabled miner can successfully get their condition recognized in court, they receive just \$793.60 a month— nearly 40 percent less than the value of benefits established in 1969.¹⁶

Some attempts have been made in the past decade to prevent black lung and support affected miners. During the Obama administration, regulations on the limits for respirable coal dust exposure were strengthened. During the Biden administration, the *2024 Lowering Miners' Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection Rule* (commonly known as the Silica Rule) and the *Black Lung Benefits Act: Authorization of Self-Insurers Rule* (commonly known as the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule) were two landmark regulatory victories in the fight to prevent black lung and ensure funding for black lung benefits. The 2024 Silica Rule set strict limits on allowable worker exposure to silica dust. Biden's Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule required self-insured coal operators to post security for 100 percent of their black lung benefit liabilities, guaranteeing that coal operators would pay for future disability benefits.¹⁷

In this report, we describe actions taken under the current Trump administration related to the coal industry. We focus on actions with a connection to black lung disease and coal miner health and safety, and contrast them against those aimed at reviving the industry. We show that, as of September 2026, the administration has invested over \$1 billion in the domestic coal industry, including repurposing \$525 million that Congress had directed via the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for carbon capture technologies and rural energy resiliency projects via the now-defunct Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) to fund projects to extend the life of coal-fired power plants,¹⁸ while simultaneously reversing progress on coal miner safety and health.¹⁹

While Trump tells miners, "You've never had a better friend in the Oval Office than me," his policies instead reflect a pattern of defunding and dismantling miner safety and health programs.²⁰ While communities may welcome the influx of funding aimed at extending the life of coal-fired power plants (and subsequently, the mines that provide coal to these plants), these policies create a troubling dichotomy when contrasted with the lack of funding or policy support for the coal miners whose health is being put at risk to fuel these plants. The administration is aware of and active in the national conversation on the coal industry, but absent from, or simply choosing not to act, on the efforts to protect coal miners.

14 "Information for Black Lung Claimants," US Department of Labor, accessed August 27, 2026, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oalj/topics/information/Information_for_Black_Lung_Claimants.

15 United States Government Accountability Office, Black Lung Benefits Program: Miners Reported Experiencing Challenges, and DOL Should Monitor Operator-Provided Medical Coverage (United States Government Accountability Office, 2026), https://files.gao.gov/reports/GAO-26-107612/index.html?_gl=1*1xoi8ik*_ga*MzY2MTY1MDE3LjE3ODI2ODgzMTc.*_ga_V393SNS3SR*czE3ODU2OTY4MTQkbzUkZzAkdDE3ODU2OTY4MTQkaJYwJGwwJGgw.

16 Brendan Muckian-Bates and Quenton King, Benefits for Coal Miners with Black Lung Falling Behind Rate of Inflation (Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and Appalachian Voices, 2026), 1–4, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/69c5e815bfef23002c96687f/t/69d532e9a3b57a605fde80c6/1775579881994/Black-Lung-Policy-Draft-February-2026+%284%29.pdf>.

17 Robert C. Scott and Ilhan Omar, "Scott, Omar Letter to DOL Re Implementation of Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule," November 24, 2025, https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/imo/media/doc/scott_omar_letter_to_dol_re_implementation_of_black_lung_self_insurance_rule.pdf.

18 Hannah Northey, "Trump Admin Redirects Carbon Capture Funds to Prop up Old Coal Plants," E&E News by POLITICO, January 15, 2026, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/trump-admin-redirects-carbon-capture-funds-to-prop-up-old-coal-plants/>.

19 See Appendix 1 for more information.

20 Senate Democrats, "Transcript: President Trump Speaks Receives an Award from the Coal Industry," Senate Democrats, Senate Democrats, February 11, 2026, <https://www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/trump-transcripts/transcript-president-trump-speaks-receives-an-award-from-the-coal-industry-21126>.

In September 2026, the UMWA highlighted ways that weak mine safety is putting coal miners at risk, noting unenforced silica dust standards combined with weakened organizing standards making it more difficult for miners to stand up for safety without putting their jobs at risk – as two factors making mines more dangerous under the Trump administration.²¹

If the federal government continues to ignore the severity of the black lung epidemic, the miners who keep our lights on will pay the price with their health and their lives. No presidential administration has done enough to address black lung, and while Congress has recently proposed multiple reform bills to improve the benefits system, none have passed into law. In an era of coal revitalization, establishing black lung protections is as important as ever. Workers are the heart of our nation's prosperity. Any actions to buoy industry should incorporate strong worker protections.

²¹ United Mine Workers of America, "UMWA President Sanson Warns Weak Mine Safety Oversight Is Putting Lives at Risk," United Mine Workers of America, n.d., accessed September 1, 2026, <https://umwa.org/news-media/press/umwa-president-sanson-warns-weak-mine-safety-oversight-is-putting-lives-at-risk/>.

Timeline

This report provides a chronology of federal actions aimed at impacting the coal industry under the second Trump Administration, particularly those directed at reviving the industry, as well as those related to miner safety and health. It also tracks efforts by advocacy groups and members of Congress to strengthen black lung benefits and counteract federal attempts to dismantle worker safety programs.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
JAN 20 2025	New President, New Executive Orders President Donald Trump issues a regulatory freeze alongside Executive Order 14158, “Establishing and Implementing the President’s Department of Government Efficiency,” ²² and Executive Order 14154, “Unleashing American Energy.” ²³	A regulatory freeze is issued on all executive agencies. The Trump administration commits to revitalizing coal without including workers’ safety or energy community support on the agenda.
JAN 31 2025	Regulations Unraveled President Donald Trump issues Executive Order 14192, “Unleashing Prosperity through Deregulation,” requiring agencies to remove ten regulations for every new one issued among other new barriers to regulatory actions. ²⁴	The action raises concerns about the future of the 2024 silica rule and the self-insurance rule. A March 2026 analysis finds an administration-wide drop in the number of newly proposed rules as well as final rules compared to previous years. ²⁵
FEB 26 2025	DOGE Slashes Vital Federal Funding President Donald Trump announces Executive Order 14222 “Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Cost Efficiency Initiative.” ²⁶	The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) pauses all non-essential travel, temporarily preventing the Coal Workers’ Health Surveillance Program’ mobile screening vehicles from traveling to provide free x-rays to miners. ²⁷
MAR 18 2025	DOGE Attempts to Close MSHA Offices DOGE’s proposal to downsize the government includes lease terminations for over 30 Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) offices, which completed thousands of inspections in the year prior. ²⁸	Proposed closures threaten the enforcement capability of an organization that has already experienced a 27 percent reduction in total staff over the past decade. MSHA already struggles to complete minimum inspection requirements. ²⁹

22 The White House, “Establishing And Implementing The President’s ‘Department Of Government Efficiency,’” The White House, January 21, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/establishing-and-implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency/>.

23 The White House, “Unleashing American Energy,” January 21, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/unleashing-american-energy/>.

24 The White House, “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation,” The White House, January 31, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/unleashing-prosperity-through-deregulation/>.

25 Tambudzai Charumbira, “Behind the \$211.8 Billion: Evaluating EO 14192’s Deregulatory Accounting,” Regulatory Studies Center, Trachtenberg School of Public Policy & Public Administration, Columbian College of Arts & Sciences, George Washington University, March 18, 2026, <https://regulatorystudies.columbian.gwu.edu/behind-2118-billion-evaluating-eo-14192s-deregulatory-accounting>.

26 The White House, “Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Cost Efficiency Initiative,” The White House, February 26, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency-cost-efficiency-initiative/>.

27 Jacob Soboroff, “Federal Workplace Safety Workers Say Gutting Their Agency Will Lead to Preventable Deaths on the Job,” NBC News, May 11, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/federal-workplace-safety-workers-letter-to-congress-rcna206076>.

28 Appalachian Citizens Law Center, Proposed MSHA Office Closures Threaten Health of Miners and Safety of Mines Across the Country (Appalachian Citizens Law Center, 2025), 1–5.

29 U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Advanced Search.”

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
APR 1 2025	90% of NIOSH Recieves Layoff Notices Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announces a 10,000-employee reduction of HHS staff. Approximately 1,000 workers, or 90 percent of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) workforce, receive layoff notices. ³⁰	Lifesaving research and surveillance on miners' health is paused. Epidemiologists and Coal Worker Surveillance Program staffers are put on administrative leave and given a termination date of June 2, 2025. ³¹ No mail room NIOSH employees can distribute communications with miners and their doctors. No IT staff can process sick miners' x-rays. ³²
APR 4 2025	Congress Fights to Save NIOSH Over 100 members of the House of Representatives from both parties call to restore NIOSH, citing the critical role NIOSH serves in promoting workplace safety and the economy. ³³ In the Senate, Senator Shelley Moore Capito pushes back against NIOSH coal program cuts, particularly those in West Virginia. ³⁴	HHS faces mounting bipartisan pressure to reconsider the blanket NIOSH layoffs.
APR 4 2025	Lifesaving Silica Rule Paused The Eighth Circuit Court issues a temporary administrative stay of the 2024 Silica Rule until the Court completes a substantive review of the petition filed by the National Stone, Sand & Gravel Association. ³⁵ MSHA and the mining industry both oppose intervention in the court case sought by the United Mine Workers of America, the United Steelworkers, and the American Thoracic Society.	The 2024 Silica Rule took effect June 17, 2024, but the compliance date for coal mine operators was April 14, 2025. Because of this stay, the compliance date passes without rule enforcement. ³⁶
APR 8 2025	Executive Orders to Revitalize the Coal Industry President Donald Trump issues three coal-related measures: Executive Order 14260 "Protecting American Energy from State Overreach," Executive Order 14261 "Reinvigorating America's Beautiful Clean Coal Industry and Amending Executive Order 1," and the proclamation "Regulatory Relief for Certain Stationary Sources to Promote American Energy." ³⁷	These measures direct federal agencies to remove regulatory barriers to coal production, including actions to open public lands for coal mining and designating coal as a critical mineral. The orders do not provide clear pathways for improving mine safety or addressing the black lung crisis.

30 Jory Heckman, "HHS Reinstates All Laid-off Employees at Workplace Safety Agency NIOSH," Federal News Network, January 14, 2026, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2026/01/hhs-reinstates-all-laid-off-employees-at-workplace-safety-agency-niosh/>.

31 Justin Hicks, "Black Lung Researchers Among Hundreds Laid Off From Federal Health Agency," Kentucky Public Radio, April 2, 2025, <https://publichealthwatch.org/2025/04/02/black-lung-researchers-among-hundreds-laid-off-from-federal-health-agency/>.

32 Soboroff, "Federal Workplace Safety Workers Say Gutting Their Agency Will Lead to Preventable Deaths on the Job."

33 "RE: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health," Congress of the United States, April 4, 2025.

34 Rachel Frazin, "Republican Senator Asks Kennedy to Restore HHS Staff That Worked on Coal Miner Health," Text, The Hill, April 22, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5261870-shelley-moore-capito-trump-administration-firings-coal-miner-health/>.

35 "Regulatory Relief for Certain Stationary Sources to Promote American Energy," The White House, April 8, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/regulatory-relief-for-certain-stationary-sources-to-promote-american-energy/>; The White House, "Protecting American Energy From State Overreach," The White House, April 8, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/protecting-american-energy-from-state-overreach/>; The White House, "Reinvigorating America's Beautiful Clean Coal Industry and Amending Executive Order 14241," The White House, April 8, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/reinvigorating-americas-beautiful-clean-coal-industry-and-amending-executive-order-14241/>.

36 Federal Register, "Lowering Miners' Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection; Delay of Effective Date of Conforming Amendments," Federal Register, April 6, 2026, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/04/06/2026-06584/lowering-miners-exposure-to-respirable-crystalline-silica-and-improving-respiratory-protection-delay>.

37 Mike Tony, "MSHA Silica Rule Delay Poised to Linger Long Past Rescheduled Compliance Date," Charleston Gazette-Mail, August 15, 2025, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/energy_and_environment/msha-silica-rule-delay-poised-to-linger-long-past-rescheduled-compliance-date/article_97872685-4099-4cfe-b581-062daf141777.html.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
APR 8 2025	MSHA Extends Silica Rule Compliance Deadline MSHA releases a statement saying that it will delay enforcement of the 2024 Silica Rule until August 2025, citing restructuring at NIOSH as one of the primary reasons. ³⁸	Miners face continued exposure to silica dust at rates that surpass any other occupation due to lapsed federal enforcement of the 2024 Silica Rule.
APR 11 2025	Court Grants Request for Judicial Stay of Silica Rule Following MSHA's voluntary pause of rule enforcement, industry asks the court for a judicial stay of the rule. Both MSHA and the mining industry request that the court case be held in abeyance, or paused. ³⁹ The stay is granted, and the case is paused to allow MSHA and the industry to attempt to resolve the legal challenges through negotiation outside of the court process.	In effect, MSHA failed to defend the 2024 rule in court, which starts a process to revise the rule.
APR 19 2025	Restore NIOSH Campaign Launched The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) launches the Restore NIOSH campaign. ⁴⁰	AIHA's advocacy to restore NIOSH and funding for other occupational health and mine safety programs results in over 9,900 letters sent to Congress. ⁴¹
APR 29 2025	Some NIOSH Workers Reinstated HHS Secretary Kennedy agrees to review mass firings, stating "we all make mistakes" to explain blanket layoffs of critical health and safety personnel. Secretary Kennedy suggests as much as 20 percent of NIOSH can be reinstated. 300 workers are reinstated, but no permanent reemployment is offered. ⁴²	Employees have no assurance that jobs will be kept through June 2, 2025. NIOSH programs and miners' health researchers' futures remain in flux.
MAY 13 2025	Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program Reinstated A federal judge orders the reinstatement of the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program following a preliminary injunction and litigation by a black lung-affected miner who had lost access to healthcare. As a result, 200 jobs are restored at the Morgantown, WV NIOSH office. ⁴³	The NIOSH Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program is restored in response to extensive advocacy and litigation efforts.

38 Appalachian Citizens' Law Center. "Assault on Coal Miners Continues as MSHA Halts Enforcement of Life-Saving Silica Dust Safeguard," Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, April 11, 2025, <https://aclc.org/2025/04/11/assault-on-coal-miners-continues-as-msha-halts-enforcement-of-life-saving-silica-dust-safeguard/>.

39 Mine Safety and Health Administration, "P26-01," Mine Safety and Health Administration, April 9, 2026, <https://www.msha.gov/compliance-and-enforcement/compliance-assistance/program-information-bulletins/p26-01>.

40 American Industrial Hygiene Association, "AIHA Launches Campaign to Restore NIOSH," AIHA, April 9, 2025, <https://www.aiha.org/press/aiha-launches-campaign-to-restore-niosh>.

41 American Industrial Hygiene Association, "AIHA Launches Campaign to Restore NIOSH."

42 Sophie Gardner and Alice Miranda, "Trump Admin Asks Laid-off Firefighter and Coal Mining Safety Research Staff Back Temporarily," Politico, April 29, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/29/trump-administration-asks-firefighter-and-coal-mining-safety-research-staff-back-temporarily-00317132>.

43 Yuki Noguchi, "Coal Miners' Health Care Hit Hard in Job Cuts to CDC," Shots - Health News, NPR, April 9, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/04/09/nx-s1-5356067/niosh-cdc-coal-miner-black-lung-trump-doge>.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
MAY 23 2025	Coal Plants Ordered to Remain Open The Trump administration issues emergency orders to keep coal plants previously planned for closure open. ⁴⁴ The first order keeps a plant in Michigan open.	Five aging coal plants are kept open past their scheduled closure. An April 2026 analysis finds that keeping plants open cost hundreds of millions of dollars in the first 11 months alone, much of which will be paid by ratepayers. ⁴⁵
MAY 29 2025	Most MSHA Office Closures Reversed The Trump administration announces that they are no longer planning to close 30-plus MSHA offices, reversing earlier proposals by DOGE. ⁴⁶ The office closures would have only saved \$18 million.	Advocates argue that keeping these offices open will help ensure adequate enforcement of MSHA's mine safety and health regulations. Six MSHA offices ultimately still close.
JUL 1 2025	MSHA Proposes Changing Mine Ventilation Standards MSHA proposes new rule changes to limit the actions and protections that District Managers can require in the ventilation plan approval processes. ⁴⁷	Ventilation plans are critical for reducing dust exposure. This proposed rule would abandon a mine safety practice that has been in place for more than half a century by removing oversight of mine ventilation planning in the name of "operational efficiency." ⁴⁸ As of August 2026, this rule change is still pending.
SEP 29 2025	Investment to Extend the Life of Coal Plants The Department of Energy (DOE) announces \$625 million to "reinvigorate and expand America's Coal Industry," aimed at bolstering and extending the lifespan of coal-fired power plants. ⁴⁹	This move draws controversy for repurposing \$525 million that Congress had directed for carbon capture technologies and rural energy resiliency projects via the now-defunct Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED). ⁵⁰
OCT 1 2025	Record-Long Government Shutdown Begins A national government shutdown begins.	NIOSH's Health Respirator Approval Program must pause evaluating and certifying mine safety equipment. Many employees from MSHA and the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission are furloughed. ⁵¹

44 National Resources Defense Council, "Trump Administration's DOE Is Forcing Coal Plants to Stay Open. Michigan Is the First Target," June 16, 2025, <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/derrell-e-slaughter/trump-administrations-doe-forcing-coal-plants-stay-open-michigan-first>.

45 Claire Brown, "Trump's Push to Keep Coal Plants Open Is Costing Hundreds of Millions," Climate, The New York Times, May 14, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/14/climate/trump-coal-plants-cost.html>.

46 Appalachian Citizens Law Center, Proposed MSHA Office Closures Threaten Health of Miners and Safety of Mines Across the Country.

47 United Mine Workers of America, "MSHA Releases Proposed Rule Change," United Mine Workers of America, 2026, <https://umwa.org/news-media/journal/msha-releases-proposed-rule-change/>.

48 Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, "Comments to Proposed Rule Revising Ventilation Plan Approval Criteria," September 2, 2025, <https://www.regulations.gov/comment/MSHA-2025-0084-0013>.

49 Department of Energy, "Energy Department Announces \$625 Million Investment to Reinvigorate and Expand America's Coal Industry," EnergyGov, September 29, 2025, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/energy-department-announces-625-million-investment-reinvigorate-and-expand-americas-coal>.

50 Northey, "Trump Admin Redirects Carbon Capture Funds to Prop up Old Coal Plants."

51 William K. Doran, "Impact of 2025 Federal Government Shutdown on Mine Safety Agencies," Ogletree, October 3, 2025, <https://ogletree.com/insights-resources/blog-posts/impact-of-2025-federal-government-shutdown-on-mine-safety-agencies/>.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
OCT 7 2025	Wayne Palmer Confirmed as New MSHA Assistant Secretary The U.S. Senate confirms Wayne Palmer as the new MSHA Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health. Palmer previously served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for MSHA during the first Trump administration. ⁵²	Prior to his confirmation, Palmer worked as an executive for the Essential Minerals Association, an industry association that supported the ongoing legal challenge to the silica dust rule.
OCT 14 2025	Miners Demand Action on Silica Dust Rule More than 80 miners and their allies protest outside the Department of Labor about the lack of enforcement of the 2024 Silica Rule. ⁵³	Black lung advocates continue to push for enforcement of the 2024 silica rule in the wake of the Trump administration's ongoing lack of action.
NOV 24 2025	Congress Demands Answers on Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule Enforcement Representatives Robert C. Scott and Ilhan Omar write a letter to the Department of Labor to inquire about stakeholder reports that the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is failing to enforce the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule. ⁵⁴	The Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule required operators to self insure their black lung liability to secure 100 percent of their black lung liability, a vast improvement from previous years where a lack of security resulted in black lung liabilities being transferred onto the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund. The Trust Fund pays black lung benefits to miners when no responsible previous employer can be held accountable.
NOV 26 2025	MSHA Reconsiders Silica Rule MSHA announces it will "engage in limited rulemaking to reconsider and seek comments on portions of the Silica Rule," referring to the April 2024 policy. ⁵⁵	As of August 2026, the enforcement dates for coal mines (April 2025) and metal/nonmetal mines (April 2026) have now passed without action.
DEC 16 2025	Black Lung Benefits Reform Attempted Senators Tim Kaine, Mark R. Warner, and John Fetterman, along with Representatives Morgan McGarvey and Robert C. Scott, reintroduce the Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act and the <i>Relief for Survivors of Miners Act</i> . ⁵⁶	These bills would improve the process of applying for federal black lung benefits.
JAN 13 2026	All NIOSH Employees Reinstated HHS reinstates all NIOSH employees who had received reduction-in-force notices in April 2025. ⁵⁷ This victory comes after months of advocacy efforts.	NIOSH employees had been on paid administrative leave for nine months, slowing progress on important research and undercutting programs critical to improving mine safety and health.

52 "Senate Confirms Keeling, Palmer for OSHA, MSHA," AIHA, accessed July 29, 2026, <https://www.aiha.org/news/251009-senate-confirms-keeling-palmer-for-osh-msha>.

53 Coal Miners, Advocates Rally in Washington, D.C. to Protest Attacks on Black Lung and Miner Protections," Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, October 14, 2025, <https://aclc.org/2025/10/14/coal-miners-advocates-rally-in-washington-d-c-to-protest-attacks-on-black-lung-and-miner-protections/>.

54 Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, "Coal Miners, Advocates Rally in Washington, D.C. to Protest Attacks on Black Lung and Miner Protections."

55 Donna Pryor et al., "MSHA Announces Plan to Revise Silica Rule," Safety Law Matters, December 19, 2025, <https://www.safetylawmatters.com/2025/12/msha-announces-plan-to-revise-silica-rule/>.

56 U.S. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, "Kaine, Warner, Fetterman, McGarvey, & Scott Introduce Legislation to Strengthen and Increase Accessibility of Black Lung Benefits Program for Miners," U.S. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, December 16, 2025, <https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-warner-fetterman-mcgarvey-and-scott-introduce-legislation-to-strengthen-and-increase-accessibility-of-black-lung-benefits-program-for-miners>.

57 Heckman, "HHS Reinstates All Laid-off Employees at Workplace Safety Agency NIOSH."

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
JAN 14 2026	No Answer on Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule Office of Workers' Compensation Programs' (OWCP) Director James R. Macy writes back to Rep. Robert C. Scott and Ilhan Omar's inquiry. The letter does not address Congress's questions about whether stakeholder reports of the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule going unenforced are accurate and, if so, what policies currently apply to self-insured operators. ⁵⁸	Uncertainty regarding the amount of security from coal operators that self-insure their black lung liabilities continues. Lack of enforcement makes it easier for coal companies to shift the costs of their black lung liability onto taxpayers.
JAN 22 2026	Wayne Palmer Testifies in Congress; MSHA Gives No Comment on Silica Rule More than 80 miners and their allies protest outside the Department of Labor about the lack of enforcement of the 2024 Silica Rule. ⁵⁹	Palmer refuses to answer questions about the 2024 Silica Rule, can not answer questions about the number of impact inspections MSHA was completing, and appears unfamiliar with the Biden-era Silica Enforcement Initiative. Palmer testifies the agency is understaffed and inspectors are working overtime to complete mandatory inspections. ⁶⁰
FEB 2 2026	Department of Labor Report Highlights Major Challenges at MSHA In its January 2026 report on top management and labor challenges, the Department of Labor's Office of the Inspector General finds MSHA is struggling with completing mandatory inspections. This includes writing up violations, verifying that operators abated hazards, protecting miners from exposure to high silica levels and preventing powered haulage and machinery accidents. ⁶¹	In October 2023, the Office of the Inspector General reported that MSHA has not inspected 176 mines for multiple years. These issues, raised under the Biden administration, have continued to go unaddressed in the second Trump administration. From 2024 to 2025, MSHA did not fulfill its legal mandate to inspect all mines and enforce safety standards. Miners were exposed to unsafe working conditions without consequences for coal operators. ⁶²
MAR 4 2026	Congress Demands Answers on Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule Reps. Robert C. Scott and Ilhan Omar write a letter to the Department of Labor to again inquire about stakeholder reports about failure to enforce black lung self-insurance programs. ⁶³	Uncertainty regarding the amount of security from coal operators that self-insure their black lung liabilities continues.

58 Robert C. Scott and Ilhan Omar, "Scott, Omar, Follow-Up Letter To DOL On Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule," March 4, 2026, https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/imo/media/doc/scott_omar_follow-up_letter_to_dol_on_black_lung_benefits_rule.pdf.

59 Kevin Druley, "MSHA Head Stays Silent on Silica Rule during House Hearing," Safety+Health Magazine, January 26, 2026, <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/msha-head-stays-silent-on-silica-rule-during-house-hearing/>.

60 Mike Tony, "MSHA Head Panned amid Resource Cuts, Silica Rule Legal Limbo," West Virginia Gazette Mail, January 24, 2026, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/energy_and_environment/miner-allies-pan-msha-head-over-resource-cuts-not-enforcing-black-lung-focused-rule/article_e37402a4-22da-48ed-bb7f-c9954be560bb.html.

61 Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor's Top Management and Performance Challenges (Department of Labor, 2026), <https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/DOL-OIG%202025%20Top%20Management%20and%20Performance%20Challenges.pdf>.

62 Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor's Top Management and Performance Challenges.

63 Scott and Omar, "Scott, Omar, Follow-Up Letter To DOL On Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule."

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
MAR 9 2026	Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule Review Launched The administration officially launches a review of the black lung self-insurance rule, bringing it back to the proposed rule stage. ⁶⁴	Previous requirements for self-insured coal operators to secure 100 percent of their estimated present and future black lung liabilities are reconsidered, ending hopes that the rule will be enforced.
MAR 11 2026	Free Annual Screenings Continue NIOSH continues free annual screenings for miners via the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program. ⁶⁵	These annual screenings provide current and former coal miners with a free, confidential way to protect their health and reduce their risk of developing lung disease.
MAR 18 2026	House Democrats Call Out Administration for Failing to Protect Taxpayers from Black Lung Liabilities The House holds a hearing on workers' benefits compensation programs, following the announcement that the administration has launched a review of the self-insurance rule. "We have seen hundreds of millions of dollars in black lung liabilities shifted onto taxpayers after self-insured operators who had posted too little collateral went bankrupt," Representative Ilhan Omar says during the hearing. "Ranking Member Scott and I have asked the Labor Department to come clean with the public about what they're doing to protect taxpayers, but the department has so far failed to give us straight answers. Stakeholders also report seeing pneumoconiosis and silicosis in miners." ⁶⁶	Congress continues to receive no answers whether the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule is being enforced. Federal lawmakers learn more about how workers' compensation programs across fields have struggled with reduced benefits, narrowed eligibility, and other barriers. There remains a lack of understanding of whether the Department of Labor has taken any steps to enforce the 100 percent liability requirements; in the meantime, a new proposed rule has been developed.
APR 3 2026	Proposed 10% Cut to MSHA Budget The Department of Labor's proposed FY27 budget cuts MSHA funding by 10 percent compared to FY 2026. ⁶⁷ The budget proposal allocates no funding to standards development, educational policy development, or program evaluation and information resources. ⁶⁸	Final budget amounts will be determined in October 2026, but additional budget cuts could hinder the understaffed, under-funded agency from protecting workers.

64 Regulation Roundup, "The Daily Roundup - Tuesday, March 10, 2026," Regulation Roundup, March 10, 2026, <https://regulationroundup.com/daily-roundup/the-daily-roundup-tuesday-march-10-2026/>.

65 CDC, "CDC's NIOSH Continues Annual Free Health Screenings for Coal Miners, Announces 2026 Dates," CDC Newsroom, March 11, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2026/2026-cdcs-niosh-continues-annual-free-health-screenings-for-coal-miners-announces-2026-dates.html>.

66 Alan Ferguson, "House Hearing Explores 'Hurdles' Related to Federal Workers' Comp Programs," Safety+Health Magazine, March 24, 2026, <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/house-hearing-explores-hurdles-related-to-federal-workers-comp-programs/>.

67 Department of Labor, FY 2027 Department of Labor Budget in Brief (Department of Labor, 2026), 1–47, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2027/FY2027BIB.pdf#page=31>.

68 Alan Ferguson, "Trump Administration Wants to Cut OSHA and MSHA Budgets, Close down Chemical Safety Board," Safety+Health Magazine, April 6, 2026, <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/trump-administration-wants-to-cut-osha-and-msha-budgets-close-down-chemical-safety-board>.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
APR 6 2026	2024 Silica Rule Delayed Indefinitely MSHA publishes a notice in the Federal Register that, due to the judicial stay on the 2024 Silica Rule, the rule's amendments are delayed indefinitely. ⁶⁹	Mine operators do not have a legal mandate to reduce workers' exposure to silica on-the-job, increasing the risk of workers developing lung disease. MSHA does not acknowledge that they worked with the industry to request an abeyance on the court case so that they could address industry's issues with the rule through other actions. ⁷⁰
APR 30 2026	Corners Cut at MSHA An Office of the Inspector General report finds that from 2018 to 2023, MSHA's emergency preparedness response system was lacking; they were improperly tracking data, system codes weren't used properly, and other administrative issues. ⁷¹	Persistent organizational and enforcement issues from the first Trump administration and the Biden administration continue to go unaddressed in the second Trump administration.
MAY 1 2026	Federal Mine Safety and Health Commissioner Removed The Trump Administration removes a Biden-appointed, Senate confirmed Federal Mine Safety and Health Commissioner before the end of his term, fires an Administrative Law Judge, and lays off more than a dozen staffers. It closes its Pittsburgh office. ⁷²	Appeal processes for legal disputes related to the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 will likely be delayed. The independence of the federal agency is threatened as officials are removed without clear reasoning.
MAY 6 2026	White House Review of 2024 Silica Rule Changes Begins The Department of Labor sends proposed changes to the 2024 Silica Rule to the White House for review. ⁷³	The administration officially begins the process of changing the 2024 silica dust rule; however, the timeline for opening the proposed rule to public scrutiny and review is unclear.
MAY 6 2026	Miners Exposed to Toxic Silica Dust The Appalachian Citizens' Law Center releases a report finding that 20 percent of surface and underground coal mines sampled for silica between April 2025 and April 2026 had dangerous levels of silica dust. ⁷⁴	The report underscores the need for stricter silica dust exposure limits, like the limits set in the 2024 Silica Rule.

69 The Federal Register, "Lowering Miners' Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection; Delay of Effective Date of Conforming Amendments," The Federal Register, April 6, 2026, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/04/06/2026-06584/lowering-miners-exposure-to-respirable-crystalline-silica-and-improving-respiratory-protection-delay>.

70 Appalachia Citizens' Law Center, "Trump Administration Uses Ridiculous Excuse to Indefinitely Delay Black Lung Safeguards," Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, April 9, 2026, <https://aclc.org/2026/04/09/trump-administration-uses-ridiculous-excuse-to-indefinitely-delay-black-lung-safeguards/>.

71 Office of the Inspector General, Despite Past Success, MSHA's Mine Emergency Response Preparedness Hampered by Persistent Issues (Department of Labor, 2026), 1–56, <https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2026/05-26-001-06-001.pdf>.

72 Tre'Vaughn Howard, "Mine-Safety Agency Shakeup Will Bring Backlog to Review Process," Bloomberg Law, Bloomberg, May 13, 2026, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/mine-safety-agency-shakeup-will-bring-backlog-to-review-process>;

Jordan Barab, "Friday Night Massacre at Mine Safety Review Commission," Confined Space, May 7, 2026.

73 Hannah Northey, "White House Launches Review of Proposed Black Lung Rule," E&E News by POLITICO, May 6, 2026, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/white-house-launches-review-of-proposed-black-lung-rule/>.

74 Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Filling the Gaps: Assessing MSHA's Silica Dust Sampling (Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, 2026), <https://aclc.org/2026/05/06/filling-the-gaps-assessing-mshas-silica-dust-sampling/>.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
MAY 8 2026	Mine Safety Hearings Focus on Industry Goals, Not Workers' Health The House Committee on Education and Workforce holds a field hearing on mine safety. Chairman Tim Walberg touts the Trump administration's efforts to expand domestic mine production and calls the 2024 Silica Rule a costly, burdensome rule that risks mine closures. ⁷⁵	Mine safety hearings focus on increasing mine production, instead of mine safety itself. Fighting black lung is not a priority articulated in the discussion.
MAY 11 2026	GAO Reports Major Challenges Within the Black Lung Benefits Program The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issues the report, "Black Lung Benefits Program: Miners Reported Experiencing Challenges, and DOL Should Monitor Operator-Provided Medical Coverage." The Office finds that miners have experienced challenges with their benefits, such as lengthy claims processing times and difficulty obtaining medical coverage from coal mine operators. The report provides additional justification for the need to increase miner benefit levels. ⁷⁶	Issues that black lung patients and advocates have been speaking out about for years are further confirmed at a federal level. The report provides a foundation for future reform measures.
JUN 4 2026	Coal Industry Receives \$700M from Administration The Trump administration announces it is pulling from the Defense Production Act Fund to direct \$700 million in support for the coal industry to encourage coal-fired power plants and coal exports. ⁷⁷	The funding would support the operation or construction of more than 15 coal plants across the US, as well as expanding a coal export terminal in Oakland, CA.
JUN 18 2026	MSHA Penalty Updates Paused MSHA announces that 2026 workplace safety penalty amounts will remain at 2025 levels, ranging from \$168 to \$332,276. ⁷⁸	Penalties for violations of MSHA-enforced laws typically increase each year to account for inflation. Without this increase, the real penalty felt by companies and the disincentive to violate the law decreases.
JUN 30 2026	Support Our Miners Act Introduced Representative Summer Lee introduces the <i>Support Our Miners Act</i> , which would increase federal black lung benefit amounts for miners and their families. ⁷⁹	Miners today receive benefits worth nearly 40 percent less than the original amount Congress established in the Black Lung Benefits Program in 1969. This bill would adjust current benefit levels to account for historic and future inflation.

75 "Hearing Recap: 'Protecting Workers and Powering America: The Future of Mining,'" Committee on Education & the Workforce, May 8, 2026, <https://edworkforce.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=413285>.

76 United States Government Accountability Office, Black Lung Benefits Program: Miners Reported Experiencing Challenges, and DOL Should Monitor Operator-Provided Medical Coverage.

77 Matthew Daly, "Trump Announces \$700 Million in New Support for Struggling Coal Industry," AP News, June 4, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-coal-mining-power-plant-climate-electricity-0a7126d66de97b10f32eaa39b1af669f>.

78 "Penalty Updates Paused For 2026: What Mine Operators Need To Know About No Increase to Safety Fines," Fisher Phillips, accessed July 29, 2026, <https://www.fisherphillips.com/en/insights/insights/what-mine-operators-need-to-know-about-no-increase-to-safety-fines>.

79 "Rep. Summer Lee Introduces Bill to Increase Benefits for Miners Suffering from Black Lung Disease | Congresswoman Summer Lee," June 30, 2026, <http://summerlee.house.gov/newsroom/press-releases/rep-summer-lee-introduces-bill-to-increase-benefits-for-miners-suffering-from-black-lung-disease>.

DATE	ACTION	CONTEXT
JUL 4 2026	Department of Government Efficiency Disbanded President Trump disbands DOGE. Elon Musk, DOGE's leader, describes the program's legacy as "a little bit successful," but not something he'd do again. ⁸⁰	After a year of chaotic layoff announcements, layoff reversals, funding cuts, and regulatory uncertainty, DOGE's actions, intended to decrease taxpayer burdens, have been estimated to instead cost \$1,028 to each U.S. taxpayer, according to the nonpartisan group Partnership for Public Service. ⁸¹
JUL 30 2026	Overhaul of Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule Proposed The Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs proposes an overhaul of the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule. The department now describes the 2024 rule as "potentially detrimental" to the coal industry. ⁸²	The proposed amendment now attempts to align with "the [president's] stated goal of increasing domestic energy production" and decreases the amount of security that coal companies are required to maintain for their black lung liabilities.
AUG 4 2026	Latest Black Lung Data Shows Highest Rates in 50 Years NIOSH scientists have tracked black lung rates among miners since 1974. Updated numbers found that 32.5 percent of long-tenured working miners in Central Appalachian states (Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia) have black lung. ⁸³	The data from NIOSH scientists underscores the need for urgent action. Nine percent of miners with as little as 15 years of experience were shown to have black lung. ⁸⁴
AUG 10 2026	White House Review of Revisions to Silica Dust Rule Concludes The White House sends the revised proposed silica dust rule back to the Department of Labor/MSHA. ⁸⁵	The timing of the public notice and comment period on the revised proposed rule remains uncertain. Mine safety advocates raise concerns that revisions will weaken enforcement and compliance aspects of the rule.
AUG 14 2026	UMWA Calls for Immediate Enforcement of Silica Rule The UMWA issues a statement calling for immediate enforcement of the 2024 Silica Rule, stating, "Miners are wearing masks, they are following rules, and yet they are still breathing in killer dust. We will not stand by while federal regulations are ignored and sat on while our members and coalfield workers pay for it with their lives." ⁸⁶	Amidst a lack of regulatory enforcement, Central Appalachian miners are being diagnosed with black lung disease at rates that have not been observed in over fifty years.

80 "Elon Musk Says DOGE 'somewhat Successful' but Would Not Do It Again," United States, Reuters, December 10, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/elon-musk-says-doge-somewhat-successful-would-not-do-it-again-2025-12-10/>.

81 "Partnership for Public Service Launches The Cost to Our Economy Tool to Quantify Economic Cost of Federal Workforce Cuts and Grant Cancellations," Partnership for Public Service, April 9, 2026, <https://ourpublicservice.org/know-the-facts/resource-library/press-room/partnership-for-public-service-launches-the-cost-to-our-economy-tool-to-quantify-economic-cost-of-federal-workforce-cuts-and-grant-cancellations/>.

82 "Black Lung Benefits Act: Authorization of Self-Insurers," Federal Register, July 30, 2026, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/07/30/2026-15325/black-lung-benefits-act-authorization-of-self-insurers>.

83 Howard Berkes and Justin Hicks, "Black Lung Rates in Appalachia Are High as the 1970s, with Thousands of Miners Sick," Science, NPR, August 5, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/08/05/nx-s1-5894884/appalachia-black-lung-coal-miners-silica-dust>.

84 Berkes and Hicks, "Black Lung Rates in Appalachia Are High as the 1970s, with Thousands of Miners Sick."

85 Hannah Northey and Kevin Bogardus, "White House Completes Review of Black Lung Dust Rule," E&E News by POLITICO, August 12, 2026, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/white-house-completes-review-of-black-lung-dust-rule/>.

86 Caity Coyne, "UMWA Calls for 'Immediate' Enforcement of Silica Rule as Black Lung Hits New High in WV, Appalachia • West Virginia Watch," West Virginia Watch, August 14, 2026, <https://westvirginiawatch.com/2026/08/14/umwa-calls-for-immediate-enforcement-of-silica-rule-as-black-lung-hits-new-high-in-wv-appalachia/>.

Understanding the Timeline

The Trump Administration's Actions Aimed at Reviving the Coal Industry

The Trump administration has shown tremendous energy for spending and providing leadership towards reviving the coal industry, investing more than \$1 billion in domestic coal since January 2025.⁸⁷ These investments include:

- Authorizing emergency orders to build new coal facilities and keep plants open past scheduled retirements⁸⁸
- Directing the Department of Defense and federal agencies to purchase electricity generated from coal
- Re-directing funding intended to improve energy resiliency and environmental protection in rural areas to coal-fired power plants
- Signing executive actions to open millions of acres of federal land for new coal leasing and mining operations⁸⁹
- Granting two-year relief for specific coal plants from strict Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) air quality and mercury emission rules as well as coal ash rules⁹⁰

While much of the Trump administration's investments and policy proposals for the coal industry have been directed at bolstering coal plants, not coal mines, it should be noted that the administration stated an explicit goal of bolstering coal plants to support the domestic coal mining industry; a June 2026 factsheet estimates these efforts will keep at least 42 mines in operation.⁹¹

In July 2026, the Trump administration met with the National Coal Council to discuss a "wish list" of nineteen actions intended to bolster the industry, none of which included increased protections for workers.⁹²

While the actions to bolster the coal industry detailed above have been controversial to some and celebrated by others, the through line is that the Trump administration's significant investments in the coal industry have not been accompanied by meaningful action to prevent the growing epidemic of black lung.

Further, they have not reflected the increasingly urgent need to diversify coalfield economies. Bureau of Labor Statistics' jobs reports show that coal mining employment has decreased by 2,200 nationwide during Trump's second term, from 40,500 coal mining jobs in January 2025 to 38,300 jobs as of July 2026.⁹³ This decline is consistent with a near-steady decline in coal employment since the 1980s, following

⁸⁷ See Appendix 1.

⁸⁸ National Resources Defense Council, "Trump Administration's DOE Is Forcing Coal Plants to Stay Open. Michigan Is the First Target."

⁸⁹ Brad Plumer and Mira Rojanasakul, "Trump Signs Orders Aimed at Reviving a Struggling Coal Industry," *Climate*, The New York Times, April 8, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/08/climate/trump-order-coal-mining.html>; Daly, "Trump Announces \$700 Million in New Support for Struggling Coal Industry."

⁹⁰ Kari Lydersen, "EPA Proposals to Keep Indiana Coal Going Would Threaten Drinking Water," *Canary Media*, July 29, 2026, <https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/fossil-fuels/epa-indiana-coal-threaten-drinking-water>.

⁹¹ "FACT SHEET: The Energy Department Is Unleashing Beautiful, Clean Coal," *EnergyGov*, February 25, 2026, <https://www.energy.gov/articles/fact-sheet-energy-department-unleashing-beautiful-clean-coal>.

⁹² National Coal Council, *Maximizing the Value of the U.S. Coal Fleet* (National Coal Council, 2026), 1–44, https://americaspower.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/FINAL-NCC_Maximizing-Value-of-US-Coal-Fleet.pdf; Jeff St. John, "The Coal Industry Gave Trump a Wish List. He's Checking Items off It.," *Canary Media*, July 29, 2026, <https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/fossil-fuels/coal-industry-trump-wish-list>.

⁹³ "Employment Situation News Release - 2026 M07 Results," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed August 27, 2026, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.htm>.

a peak in the 1920s.⁹⁴

As noted by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in a statement after the Trump administration's April 8, 2025 executive orders, "Coal miners and their communities need more than a temporary reprieve. We want coal workers to have good, stable jobs not just for the next four years, but for the next forty. That future must be built with sustainable policy, investment in new technologies like carbon capture and storage, and support for the economic diversification of coal-producing regions."⁹⁵

The economic devastation caused by this employment downturn can not be overstated; efforts to diversify coal-dependent economies and create equivalent high-paying jobs to those found in the coal industry should be a top priority.

The Trump Administration's Actions to Downsize Government Agencies

Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) Staffing Reductions, Office Closures, and Proposed Budget Cuts

In March 2024, MSHA's released their FY2025 budget request to Congress, which stated, "hiring additional mine inspectors remains a critically important priority for MSHA to ensure that the Agency can enforce mandatory safety and health standards, continue existing enforcement and compliance assistance initiatives, and initiate new special emphasis programs in targeted areas."⁹⁶ In that proposal, MSHA requested that Congress grant them the capacity to employ 1,742 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees in order to fulfill its mandate to protect the health and safety of miners.⁹⁷

Instead of increasing the capacity of MSHA, by early 2025, due to downsizing driven by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), MSHA lost approximately 200 employees, or roughly 10 percent of its staffing. These cuts followed more than a decade of staffing decline, as noted in Figure 1.

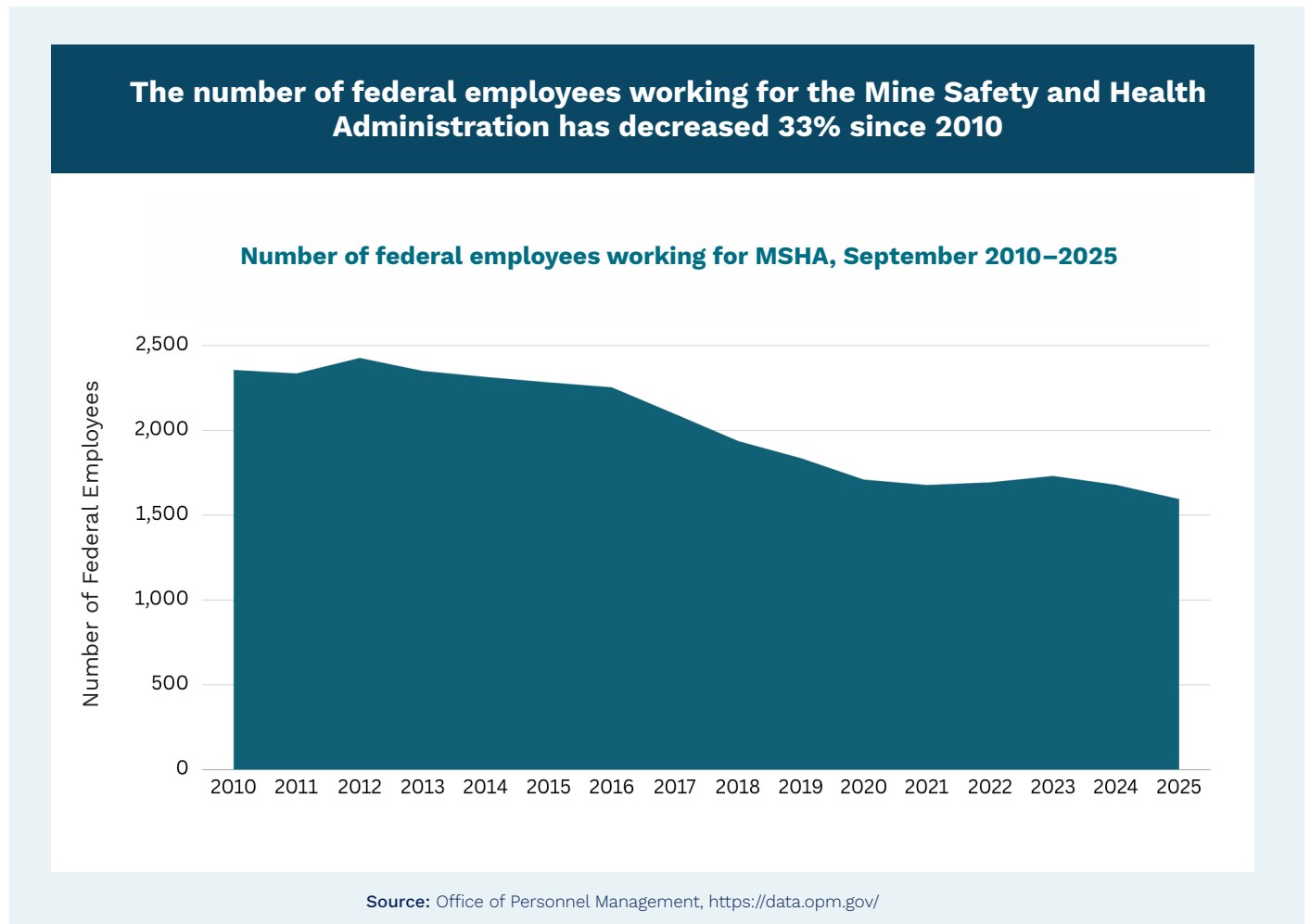
⁹⁴ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, "All Employees, Coal Mining," FRED, August 7, 2026, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CES1021210001>.

⁹⁵ UMWA Appreciates Executive Order," United Mine Workers of America, n.d., accessed September 2, 2026, <https://umwa.org/news-media/press/umwa-appreciates-executive-order/>.

⁹⁶ Mine Safety and Health Administration, FY 2025 Congressional Budget Justification Mine Safety and Health Administration (Mine Safety and Health Administration, 2025), 1–83, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2025/CBJ-2025-V2-13.pdf>.

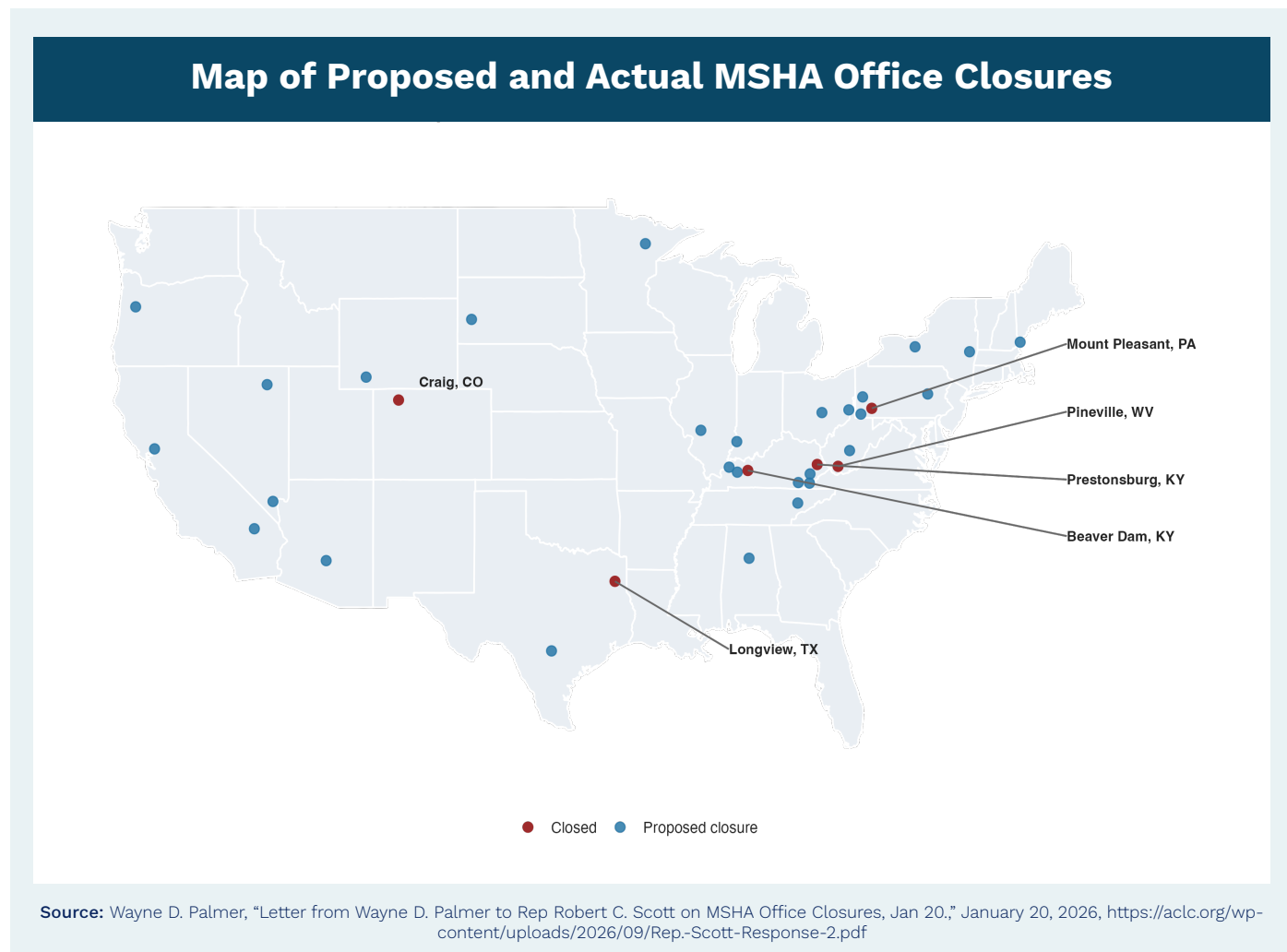
⁹⁷ Mine Safety and Health Administration, FY 2025 Congressional Budget Justification Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Figure 1



In addition to cutting staff, the DOGE initiative also sought to close more than 30 MSHA offices. Pushback from advocacy organizations helped preserve many of these offices, but six MSHA offices were still closed; those locations were in Craig, CO, Beaver Dam, KY, Prestonsburg, KY, Mount Pleasant, PA, Longview, TX, and Pineville, WV.

Figure 2



These MSHA cuts had consequences. In March 2025, an individual representing Department of Labor workers for the American Federation of Government Employees shared with a reporter that inspectors were barely keeping up with their mandatory inspections—semi-annual inspections at surface mines and quarterly inspections at underground mines. At a January 2026 House Education and Labor Committee oversight hearing, Assistant Secretary of MSHA Wayne Palmer stated inspectors were traveling and working overtime in order to complete mandatory inspections.

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. An analysis of MSHA inspections from 2024 to 2025 shows that the total number of inspections completed by the agency dropped by 5 percent in 2025, a decrease of nearly 2,000 inspections.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, "Black Lung Priorities For Appropriations Sign On Letter FY 27," March 2026, <https://aclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Black-Lung-Priorities-for-Appropriations-Sign-On-Letter-FY27-Mar-2026.pdf>.

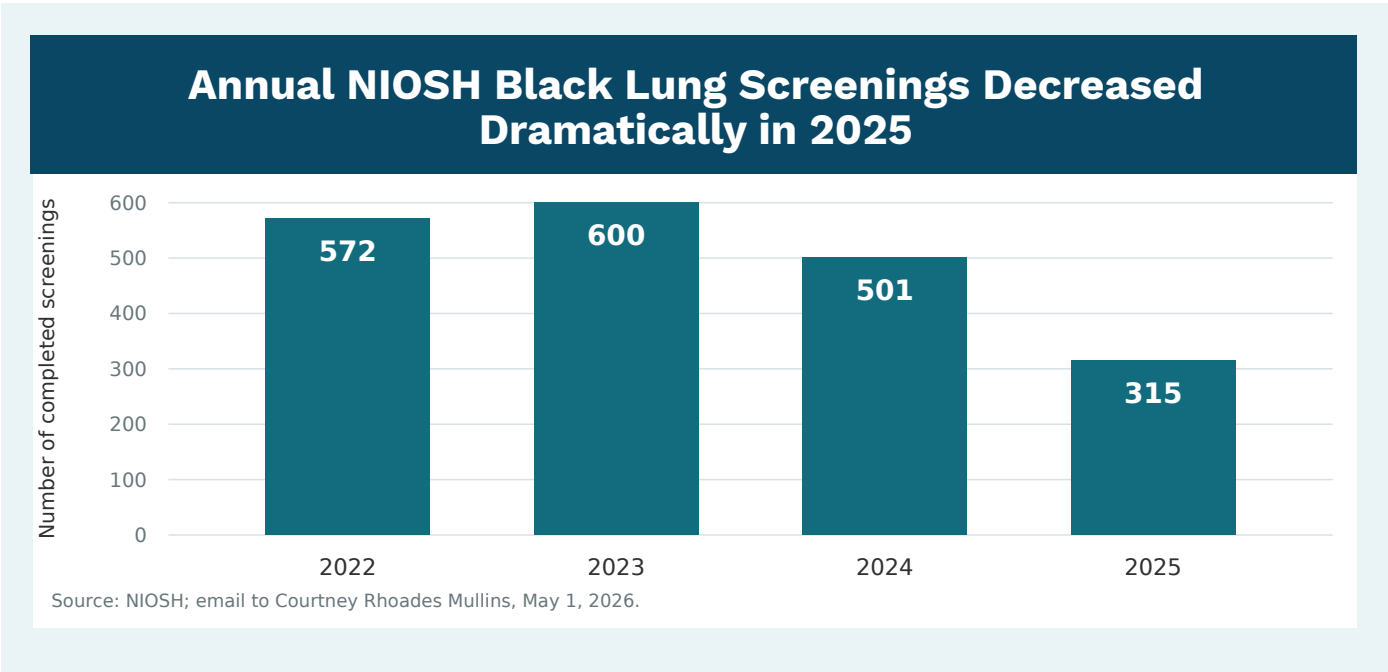
Despite this evidence that mine safety is lacking under budget and staffing cuts, the Trump administration’s FY27 budget requests that Congress enact an additional 10 percent budget reduction for MSHA.⁹⁹

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Restructuring and Layoffs

On April 1, 2025, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kennedy announced a 10,000-employee reduction of HHS staff, including about 1,000 employees at the NIOSH—approximately 90 percent of NIOSH’s total staffing.

These layoffs effectively dismantled programs critical to black lung prevention and monitoring, including the Coal Workers’ Health Surveillance Program, the Pittsburgh Mining Research Division, and the positions of black lung researchers in NIOSH’s Morgantown, WV office. These positions included staff responsible for conducting free black lung screenings and operating the Part 90 program, which allows US coal miners with evidence of black lung disease to transfer to a low-dust area of a mine, and others. Litigation led by representatives of miners, pressure from Senator Shelley Capito, and outrage from miners, their families, and regional advocates led to the reinstatement of workers at the Morgantown office in May 2025.¹⁰⁰ As of January 2026, after months of organizing, layoffs were revoked across all NIOSH locations; however, the instability and job uncertainty led to the loss of many experienced and dedicated employees.

Figure 3



99 Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center, “Black Lung Priorities For-Appropriations Sign On Letter FY 27,” March 2026, <https://aclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Black-Lung-Priorities-for-Appropriations-Sign-On-Letter-FY27-Mar-2026.pdf>.
100 Jim Bissett, “Capito: More than 100 Morgantown NIOSH Workers to Be Called Back Permanently | U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia,” Shelley Moore Capito, May 14, 2025, <https://www.capito.senate.gov/news/in-the-news/capito-more-than-100-morgantown-niosh-workers-to-be-called-back-permanently>.

Impacts at the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission

The Federal Mine Safety & Health Review Commission (FMSHRC) provides administrative trials and appellate review of legal disputes related to the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977; the commission was established as independent to avoid political influence in decision-making. The commission primarily makes decisions in disputes regarding penalties assessed against mine operators, whether mine operators violated safety and health standards, discrimination against whistleblowers, and more. In May 2026, the Trump administration fired Commissioner Moshe Z. Marvit, whose appointment was supposed to extend until August 2028. Marvit filed a lawsuit challenging his termination, as the only reason a commissioner can be removed from office is under situations of “inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office.”¹⁰¹ Simultaneously, the Pittsburgh office was closed and more than a dozen additional staff were laid off, including an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ).

The loss of an ALJ can stall progress on mine safety and health cases and the FMSHRC is now nonfunctional.

The FMSHRC has five seats for commissioners. Decisions to accept or reject a case for review require two voting commissioners while decisions on these cases, and, once accepted, require a quorum of three commissioners. As of May 2026, four commission seats were filled. Following Marvit’s removal only three commissioners remained, and two of those commissioners had appointments that expired at the end of August 2026. If new commissioners are not appointed and confirmed, the commission will become nonfunctional. They will not be able to act on any filings. As of September 1, 2026, only one commissioner remained, rendering the commission nonfunctional. On September 2, 2026, Marvit dismissed his lawsuit in light of the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Trump v. Slaughter* which expanded President Trump’s ability to fire appointees at independent agencies.¹⁰² Without an independent agency overseeing government enforcement of the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act, miners are at increased risk of harm.

The Trump Administration’s Deregulatory Agenda

In addition to the cuts to mine safety agencies and programs, deregulation has hindered agencies’ ability to fulfill their mandate to protect miners from black lung. The Trump administration has not enforced the 2024 Silica Rule nor the Black Lung Self-Insurance Rule, and is now issuing new proposed rules in their place.

The Silica Rule

For decades, miners, doctors, and other black lung advocates have called for stronger limits to silica dust exposure. In April 2024, the Biden administration finalized a rule to limit silica dust exposure to 50 µg/m³ for a full shift exposure, calculated as an eight-hour time-weighted average. This was the most protective

¹⁰¹ Zach Schonfeld, “Mine Safety Commissioner Moshe Marvit Sues Trump over Firing,” May 8, 2026, <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5869427-mine-safety-commissioner-sues-trump/>.

¹⁰² Katz Banks Kumin, “Federal Mine Safety Commissioner Dismisses Challenge to His Unlawful Removal; Miners’ Safety Put at Risk by Supreme Court’s Decision in *Slaughter*,” Katz Banks Kumin LLP, September 2, 2026, <https://katzbanks.com/news/marvit-dismiss/>.

limit ever proposed in the history of federal mine safety and health regulations, and was intended to go into effect for coal mines in April 2025. Mining companies sued the Biden administration in late 2024, arguing that the rule would cause “irreparable harm” to their businesses. The Biden Administration’s Department of Labor defended the rule, but when the Trump Administration entered office, the Department’s posture shifted.

In April 2025, MSHA released a statement saying that they would delay the enforcement of the 2024 silica rule until August, citing the Administration’s own restructuring at NIOSH as one of the primary reasons. Following MSHA’s voluntary pause of rule enforcement, industry asked the court for a judicial stay of the rule, and both MSHA and the mining industry requested that the court case be held in abeyance, or paused. The stay was granted, and the case paused to allow MSHA and the industry to attempt to resolve the legal challenges through negotiation outside of the court process. To address the industry’s issues, the Trump administration is now in the process of releasing a revised proposed rule, and the 2024 rule and exposure limits have gone unenforced.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, throughout these delays, miners have continued to be exposed to toxic levels of dust. Recent analysis by the Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center found that between April 2025 and April 2026 at least 20 percent of coal mines sampled for silica dust had silica exposure levels over 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.¹⁰⁴

Based on industry comments, expected revisions to the 2024 Silica Rule include reductions in the frequency of required dust sampling, limiting available and required medical surveillance for metal and nonmetal miners, and compliance regimes that prioritize the use of respirators and administrative controls for protection rather than engineering controls.¹⁰⁵ These changes are likely to result in a rule that is less protective and less impactful in curbing the growth of the black lung epidemic. For years, miner safety and health advocates have raised concerns about over-relying on respiratory and personal protective equipment on their own. It is difficult to get a proper fit for each miner, every use. Respirators can be difficult to use in small spaces and tight mining conditions, and there are many examples of miners who have worn respirators but still contracted black lung disease.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, engineering controls reduce dust in the mine environment, reducing exposure for all workers. Respiratory protection and administrative controls only address dust exposure at the individual level of each miner.

103 Jordan Barab, “Trouble in Republican Paradise? Mineworkers Don’t Want to Die,” *Confined Space*, December 8, 2025, <https://jordanbarab.com/confinedspace/2025/12/08/trouble-in-republican-paradise-mineworkers-dont-want-to-die/>.

104 Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center, *Filling the Gaps*.

105 Office of Management and Budget, “Respirable Crystalline Silica,” Office of Information Regulatory Affairs, 2026, <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=202510&RIN=1219-AC22>.

106 Howard Berkes, “Black Lung: Why Respirators Are Not A Solution,” *Black Lung Returns To Coal Country*, NPR, July 9, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/07/09/156375910/black-lung-why-respirators-are-not-a-solution>.

BOX 1

COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING HIGHLIGHTS THE GAPS LEFT BY THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Groups like the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center have stepped in to monitor the status of mine safety and enforcement in the absence of leadership by the Trump administration and Congress. Some papers published include:

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

Released: March 2025. An analysis of the critical inspections conducted by 33 MSHA offices that have been slated for closure by the Trump administration. [Link to paper.](#)

Filling the Gaps: Assessing MSHA's Silica Dust Sampling

Released: May 2026. An analysis of silica dust samples from coal mines collected by MSHA during the first year following the intended enforcement date of the 2024 silica rule (April 2025 – April 2026) found that miners are being exposed to toxic levels of silica dust at 20 percent of sampled mines. [Link to paper.](#)

Legislative Solutions Exist—Congress Must Ensure Monthly Disability Benefits Meet Coal Mining Community Needs

Released: February 2026. An analysis of how the cost of living continues to outpace federal black lung disability benefits for miners with black lung disease and their families, and opportunities for Congress to address this concern. [Link to paper.](#)

The Self-Insurance Rule

U.S. coal companies are allowed to either self-insure or obtain third-party insurance to cover their black lung liabilities—the estimated present and future financial obligations required to compensate coal miners, or their dependents, who are totally disabled by black lung or silicosis.

Historically, companies that self-insure have, on average, only secured about 17 percent of their present and future black lung liabilities. This has resulted in millions of dollars of black lung liability and black lung benefit payments being transferred to the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, which pays out benefits to miners where no responsible former employer can be identified. Though the Trust Fund is funded by revenues from a coal excise tax, it is currently insolvent due to historic, legacy debt remaining from when the Trust Fund was first established in the 1970s. When it was first established, the number of miners sick with disease and requiring benefits exceeded the revenues to the fund, causing it to accrue debt that the industry excise tax has never been able to repay. The transfer of new liabilities onto the Fund and away from companies further exacerbates this insolvency issue, requiring taxpayers to pick up the tab.

The Biden administration finalized a rule in December 2024 that would require companies to secure 100 percent of their liabilities, thus securing miners' benefits and coal operators' responsibility for those benefits. The Trump administration determined that the new requirements put an "excessive burden"¹⁰⁷ on coal mine operators, and instead proposed a new rule where the percent of liabilities that must

¹⁰⁷ Federal Register, "Black Lung Benefits Act: Authorization of Self-Insurers," Federal Register, July 30, 2026, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/07/30/2026-15325/black-lung-benefits-act-authorization-of-self-insurers>.

be secured would be based on the operators' calculated financial risk. On average, the administration projects that security requirements will cover 70 percent of the companies' black lung liabilities. Further, the newly proposed rule gives operators three years to comply with increased security requirements rather than requiring that additional security within the year. This reduction in securitization requirements has a minimal impact on coal operator revenues, but again causes uncertainty regarding the future impacts to the Trust Fund and funding for the Federal Black Lung Benefits Program. Particularly concerning are the sizable black lung liabilities of some of the larger self-insuring coal companies. Two companies alone have \$505 million in liability and collectively have secured only \$33.8 million (less than 7%). Providing them with three years to comply with increased security requirements places additional risk on the Trust Fund.¹⁰⁸

Congressional Actions on Black Lung

For several years, members of Congress have led legislation to improve the black lung benefits system. Unfortunately, this legislation has made little progress with the bills having never gained bipartisan support, led only by Democratic members from coal-producing states and cosponsored by additional Democrats.

The Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act (BLBIA) was first championed and introduced by Senator Casey (D-PA) and Representative Matt Cartwright (D-PA) in 2014. It was most recently introduced in 2025, now led by Senator Kaine (D-VA) and Representative McGarvey (D-KY). Though the language has evolved, it has been reintroduced in every subsequent Congressional session, each time failing to achieve bipartisan support. The last time it received a committee hearing was in the House in 2022. It passed through committee on partisan lines. Over the years, Republicans have cited its cost impact as a concern. A 2022 budget estimate of the bill projected it would cost just \$74 million over ten years, less than \$8 million a year. Some of the bill's primary aims include 1) to improve miner access to medical and legal services¹⁰⁹ to better support their case during the federal black lung claims process 2) provide legal clarity on how to define severe forms of the disease, and 3) to change annual adjustments to miner benefit levels such that they are tied to the cost of living rather than the federal pay scale.¹¹⁰ While benefits have increased over time, the monthly financial benefit has not kept up with inflation. This is because the benefit is tied to the federal pay scale rather than the cost of living. Today, single miners receive nearly 40 percent less than the value of the original amount (adjusted for inflation) — just \$794 a month.

The Relief for Survivors of Miners Act is a more recent set of reforms led by Senator Warner (D-VA) and Rep. McGarvey (D-KY). It was first introduced in 2023 and again in 2025. It has never received a hearing. The bill includes some of the same provisions as the BLBIA regarding reforms to improve miners' access to medical and legal services. It also re-establishes a provision that assumes that a miner's death was due to black lung if they were disabled due to pneumoconiosis at the time of death unless proven otherwise.¹¹¹

108 Federal Register, "Black Lung Benefits Act."

109 Currently, just 35 percent of miners who file for federal black lung benefits are represented by an attorney, according to the US Department of Labor.

110 "Black Lung Program Statistics," U.S. Department of Labor, accessed August 27, 2026, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/owcp/dcmwc/statistics/AttorneyAndLayRepresentationOfClaimants>.

111 Currently, survivors have to prove that a coal miner's black lung disease directly contributed to their death before they're eligible to receive benefits. This can be difficult and time consuming if there are confounding factors that require multiple medical opinions and also leads to a long delay in receiving benefits they will ultimately be eligible for. The re-established presumption (which was removed in 1981) may only be rebutted by proving that no part of the miner's death was caused by black lung.

In addition, this bill called for a Government Accountability Office report on the adequacy of miner benefit levels. However, outside of the legislative process, Senator Warner worked with members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to request this GAO study, which was released in May 2026.

The most recent piece of legislation to reform the Black Lung Benefits system is the Support Our Miners Act. This bill is led by Representative Lee (D-PA). The bill directly responds to a call from 84 local governments across Appalachia to increase miners' federal black lung benefits. Not only does the bill change the benefits system such that they are tied to cost-of-living adjustments in the future, but it also retroactively adjusts benefits for inflation. The bill would provide an increase of \$458 per month for a single miner, an annual increase of approximately \$5,500. Miners across Central Appalachia are speaking out in support of this bill, but thus far no representatives from the region have signed on as cosponsors.¹¹²

Conclusion

Over the past 500 days, the Trump administration has pledged to revitalize American energy by

¹¹² Alice Hayes, "Black Lung Benefits Need to Be Increased," Appalachian News-Express, Appalachian News Express, August 11, 2026, <https://www.news-expressky.com/>; Liam Niemeyer, "Eastern Kentucky Group Urges Rep. Rogers to Support Bill Boosting Black Lung Benefits • Kentucky Lantern," Kentucky Lantern, August 25, 2026, <https://kentuckylantern.com/>; Judy Riffe, "Judy Riffe: Where Is WV's Congressional Delegation on Black Lung? (Opinion) | Op-Ed Commentaries | Wvgazettermail.Com," July 16, 2026, <https://www.wvgazettermail.com>

revitalizing domestic coal production—an energy source that relies on the dangerous and difficult labor of coal mining. Federal mine safety and health programs are our best resource for mitigating harm caused by coal production and ending the worsening black lung epidemic. However, in contrast, our timeline reflects that efforts to revitalize coal have been enacted in tandem with efforts to dismantle mine health and safety programs. Throughout our report, we highlighted instances where the federal government has intentionally cut funding and staffing from longstanding mine safety and health programs and reversed regulatory progress that occurred during the Biden administration.

The choice to defund and deregulate mine safety and health programs has consequences. Civil servants who have dedicated decades to supporting miners' health suffered job instability or left civil service careers.¹¹³ The temporary pause on mobile black lung screenings delayed diagnoses and paused approvals for the Part 90 program. Failure to enforce the 2024 Silica Rule has resulted in hundreds of working shifts during which miners are exposed to toxic levels of dust.¹¹⁴

The lack of urgency to protect miners from increasingly dangerous mine conditions is not just happening at the federal level. Even as mining thin seams increases risks of black lung, West Virginia continues to offer a thin-seam coal tax break, which lowers the state's standard 5% coal severance tax to 1.65 percent for seams between 37 and 45 inches and 0.65 percent for seams less than 37 inches; this special West Virginia tax break for thin-seam coal cost \$84 million in 2022.¹¹⁵ These tax breaks are intended to increase the profitability of mining metallurgical coal, which is used for steel-making, but have the added effect of incentivizing the coal industry to prioritize the most dangerous seams for miners.

The risks that coal miners face were underscored in a September 1, 2026 release by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). As Brian Sanson, UMWA International president, stated, "We are watching a complete breakdown in the federal safety net meant to keep coal miners alive. When federal regulators fall asleep at the wheel, coal operators step in and put production goals ahead of human safety."¹¹⁶

The federal government has justified haphazard layoffs and budget cuts impacting mine safety and health programs as necessary measures to boost American energy and cut federal expenditures. Yet, it is unclear whether current federal measures will revive the US coal industry, and early results suggest DOGE actions increased taxpayers' burdens.¹¹⁷ In addition, the cost of implementing protections and improvements is often insignificant. For example, the Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act would cost just \$7.4 million annually, and the coal industry's implementation costs for the 2024 silica rule were projected as just \$8.2 million annually.¹¹⁸

As black lung reaches 50-year record-high rates in Central Appalachia, it is clear who is and will pay the price for these program cuts – miners, taxpayers, unions, and more.¹¹⁹ When coal operators allow miners to work in unsafe conditions, causing black lung and other injuries, miners pay with their lives. When coal operators fail to adequately secure their black lung liabilities, the cost of federal black lung benefits is

113 John Raby, "Judge Orders Restoration of Jobs in Health Program for West Virginia Coal Miners," AP News (Charleston, W.Va.), May 12, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/niosh-layoffs-coal-rfk-west-virginia-2a19a668e0ff535863c1ff3344b42179>.

114 Appalachian Citizens' Law Center, Filling the Gaps.

115 O'Leary, Sean. 2026. "Amid a Growing Budget Deficit, Lawmakers Advance an Ineffective Tax Cut for Coal." West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy. March 2, 2026. <https://wvpolicy.org/amid-a-growing-budget-deficit-lawmakers-advance-an-ineffective-tax-cut-for-coal/>.

116 United Mine Workers of America, "UMWA President Sanson Warns Weak Mine Safety Oversight Is Putting Lives at Risk."

117 "Partnership for Public Service Launches The Cost to Our Economy Tool to Quantify Economic Cost of Federal Workforce Cuts and Grant Cancellations," Partnership for Public Service, April 9, 2026, <https://ourpublicservice.org/know-the-facts/resource-library/press-room/partnership-for-public-service-launches-the-cost-to-our-economy-tool-to-quantify-economic-cost-of-federal-workforce-cuts-and-grant-cancellations/>.

118 Congressional Budget Office, "H.R. 6102, Black Lung Benefits Improvement Act of 2022," September 26, 2022, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr6102.pdf>; Mine Safety and Health Administration, "Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) Respirable Crystalline Silica Rule," 2023, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cU_-ONhp7IHjwmmIF-FWIEFsufs_WRT/view.

119 Berkes and Hicks, "Black Lung Rates in Appalachia Are High as the 1970s, with Thousands of Miners Sick."

transferred to the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund which is currently bailed out by the U.S. Treasury annually. Further, in many federal black lung cases where the miner has prevailed, coal companies have still failed to issue or delayed issuance of the medical insurance cards to which miners are entitled, shifting costs onto Medicare, union provided insurance, and the miners themselves.¹²⁰

The 1969 Federal Coal Mine Safety and Health Act declared that “the first priority and concern of all in the coal mining industry must be the health and safety of its most precious resource—the miner.”¹²¹ The federal government has failed to uphold regulatory standards in service to this duty and, instead, the preventable black lung epidemic has inflicted grief and suffering upon generations of American miners and families. Further, the black lung benefits system offers these families less and less to live on as Congress fails to enact reforms. Last, communities are bearing the consequences of the downturn in the coal industry and recognize that an economic development strategy that relies only on the hope of a coal industry revival is not realistic. This is especially true for communities in Central Appalachia, where coal has been mined for over a hundred years, and where the continued extraction of smaller and smaller coal seams makes less and less economic sense while causing greater and greater health impacts.

Coal communities that are or were once dependent on coal extraction for jobs and public revenue need economic diversification and community development strategies to thrive long-term; no mine or plant operates forever.¹²² As stated in the UMW’s 2021 policy paper Preserving Coal Country, “Change is coming, whether we seek it or not. Too many inside and outside the coalfields have looked the other way when it comes to recognizing and addressing specifically what that change must be, but we can look away no longer. We must act, while acting in a way that has real, positive impact on the people who are most affected by this change. To do otherwise would be to abandon our responsibilities to the people we represent, their families and their communities.”¹²³

Coal miners have powered American innovation, but at great cost. No person should have to choose between putting food on the table or preserving their respiratory health. Those who continue mining deserve to do so without sacrificing their health, and others who live in coal mining communities should be given the opportunity to make a choice about the type of livelihood they pursue.

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Appendix 1

Breakdown of Federal Spending on Coal Industry Supports from January 2025–September 2026

Funding opportunity announcement	Award announcement	Program title	Program description	Release	Amount	Funding source
June 2026	June 2026	Defense Production Act Title III Project Selections	\$75M for expanding the West Gateway coal export terminal in Oakland, CA.	View Release	\$75,000,000	Defense Production Act Fund
June 2026	June 2026	Defense Production Act Title III Project Selections	\$425M to support 12 existing coal plants across 10 states: WV, KY, NC, IN, TN, AR, AZ, OK, ND, WI.	View Release	\$425,000,000	Defense Production Act Fund
Sept 2025	June 2026	Restoring Reliability: Coal Recommissioning and Modernization (Topic 1)	\$89M for proposed coal plant in Anchorage, AK.	View Release	\$89,000,000	Redirected carbon capture pilot project funding
Sept 2025	June 2026	Restoring Reliability: Coal Recommissioning and Modernization (Topic 1)	\$18.5M for proposed coal plant in Mt. Storm, West Virginia.	View Release	\$18,500,000	Redirected carbon capture pilot project funding
Sept 2025	June 2026	Restoring Reliability: Coal Recommissioning and Modernization (Topic 1)	\$78M to recommission a coal plant in Cumberland, MD.	View Release	\$78,000,000	Redirected carbon capture pilot project funding
Sept 2025	June 2026	Restoring Reliability: Coal Recommissioning and Modernization (Topic 1)	\$164.5M for modernizing a coal plant in Guayama, Puerto Rico.	View Release	\$164,500,000	Redirected carbon capture pilot project funding
Sept 2025	Feb 2026	Restoring Reliability: Coal Recommissioning and Modernization (Topic 2)	\$175M for Rural Capacity for coal plants upgrades at six plants in four states: WV, OH, NC and KY.	View Release	\$175,000,000	The former DOE Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote areas program
Sept 2025	Expected date for selection notifications was May 2026	Improving Efficiency, Reliability, and Flexibility of Coal-Based Power Plants	\$50M for wastewater management systems that enables coal plants to extend their service life.	View Release	\$50,000,000	DOE Office of Fossil Energy
Sept 2025	Expected date for selection notifications was May 2026	Improving Efficiency, Reliability, and Flexibility of Coal-Based Power Plants	\$25M for Engineering and Implementation of Dual Firing Retrofits.	View Release	\$25,000,000	DOE Office of Fossil Energy
Sept 2025	Expected date for selection notifications was May 2026	Improving Efficiency, Reliability, and Flexibility of Coal-Based Power Plants	\$25M for Development and Testing of Natural Gas Cofiring Systems.	View Release	\$25,000,000	DOE Office of Fossil Energy
Total					\$1,125,000,000	



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