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Lucerne Mill among facilities accused of safety violations

By JEREMY FUGLEBERG
Casper Star-Tribune

CASPER, Wyo. — A bentonite facility near Thermopolis was one of several mining sites across the county issued citations from federal inspectors in a safety sweep in April, although the facility's owner isn't sure why it was included in the highly publicized inspections.

Inspectors from the U.S. Department of Labor's Mine and Safety Health Administration, or MSHA, wrote six citations for the Lucerne Mill, owned by Billings-based Wyo-Ben Inc., in the sweep, the agency announced Tuesday.

The citations were a handful of the 255 citations and orders written during what the agency called "special impact" inspections of 15 mines, including eight coalmines.

The Lucerne Mill was the only Wyoming site to be inspected in the sweep.

"MSHA inspectors continue to find and cite serious violations at mines we have targeted during previous impact inspections," said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health.

"We will continue to level this enforcement tool until repeat offenders demonstrate they take their responsibilities for the safety and health of miners seriously."

The agency said the inspections began "in force" in April 2010 after the explosion at the Upper Big Branch coal mine in West Virginia that year that killed 29 miners. The inspections target mines that have poor compliance history or concerns, the agency said.

But a representative for Wyo-Ben said he's not sure why the Lucerne Mill was targeted.

The site has a good safety record with no serious accidents or injuries and the April inspections seemed like one of the standard twice-a-year inspections, said Rick Magstadt, the company's vice president of manufacturing.

"To us it was an ordinary inspection," he said. "I have no idea why we would be targeted for an impact inspection, so I find it unusual that it would be characterized as an impact inspection."

Prior to this year, the Lucerne Mill had been cited four times since the site began operation in 2009, for a penalty total of \$646, according to MSHA records.

Including the six citations from the April inspection, the site has received seven citations in 2011 for a penalty total of \$848.

Wyo-Ben owns three bentonite facilities in Wyoming: the Lucerne Mill, the Stucco Mine/Mill near Greybull and Sage Creek Mill outside of Lovell.

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— Rick Magstadt
Wyo-Ben Inc. representative

Lucerne Mill Receives Citations

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