

§ 725.492 Successor operator defined.

(a) Any person who, on or after January 1, 1970, acquired a mine or mines, or substantially all of the assets thereof, from a prior operator, or acquired the coal mining business of such prior operator, or substantially all of the assets thereof, shall be considered a "successor operator" with respect to any miners previously employed by such prior operator.

(b) The following transactions shall also be deemed to create successor operator liability:

(1) If an operator ceases to exist by reason of a reorganization which involves a change in identity, form, or place of business or organization, however effected;

(2) If an operator ceases to exist by reason of a liquidation into a parent or successor corporation; or

(3) If an operator ceases to exist by reason of a sale of substantially all its assets, or as a result of merger, consolidation, or division.

(c) In any case in which a transaction specified in paragraph (b), or substantially similar to a transaction specified in paragraph (b), took place, the resulting entity shall be considered a "successor operator" with respect to any miners previously employed by such prior operator.

(d) This section shall not be construed to relieve a prior operator of any liability if such prior operator meets the conditions set forth in § 725.494. If the prior operator does not meet the conditions set forth in § 725.494, the following provisions shall apply:

(1) In any case in which a prior operator transferred a mine or mines, or substantially all of the assets thereof, to a successor operator, or sold its coal mining business or substantially all of the assets thereof, to a successor operator, and then ceased to exist within the terms of paragraph (b), the successor operator as identified in paragraph (a) shall be primarily liable for the payment of benefits to any miners previously employed by such prior operator.

(2) In any case in which a prior operator transferred mines, or substantially all of the assets thereof, to more than one successor operator, the suc-

cessor operator that most recently acquired a mine or mines or assets from the prior operator shall be primarily liable for the payment of benefits to any miners previously employed by such prior operator.

(3) In any case in which a mine or mines, or substantially all the assets thereof, have been transferred more than once, the successor operator that most recently acquired such mine or mines or assets shall be primarily liable for the payment of benefits to any miners previously employed by the original prior operator. If the most recent successor operator does not meet the criteria for a potentially liable operator set forth in § 725.494, the next most recent successor operator shall be liable.

(e) An "acquisition," for purposes of this section, shall include any transaction by which title to the mine or mines, or substantially all of the assets thereof, or the right to extract or prepare coal at such mine or mines, becomes vested in a person other than the prior operator.

725.493 Employment relationship defined.

(a)(1) In determining the identity of a responsible operator under this part, the terms "employ" and "employment" shall be construed as broadly as possible, and shall include any relationship under which an operator retains the right to direct, control, or supervise the work performed by a miner, or any other relationship under which an operator derives a benefit from the work performed by a miner. Any individuals who participate with one or more persons in the mining of coal, such as owners, proprietors, partners, and joint venturers, whether they are compensated by wages, salaries, piece rates, shares, profits, or by any other means, shall be deemed employees. It is the specific intention of this paragraph to disregard any financial arrangement or business entity devised by the actual owners or operators of a coal mine or coal mine-related enterprise to avoid the payment of benefits to miners who, based upon the economic reality of their relationship to this enterprise, are, in fact, employees of the enterprise.

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(2) The payment of wages or salary shall be prima facie evidence of the right to direct, control, or supervise an individual's work. The Department intends that where the operator who paid a miner's wages or salary meets the criteria for a potentially liable operator set forth in § 725.494, that operator shall be primarily liable for the payment of any benefits due the miner as a result of such employment. The absence of such payment, however, will not negate the existence of an employment relationship. Thus, the Department also intends that where the person who paid a miner's wages may not be considered a potentially liable operator, any other operator who retained the right to direct, control or supervise the work performed by the miner, or who benefitted from such work, may be considered a potentially liable operator.

(b) This paragraph contains examples of relationships that shall be considered employment relationships for purposes of this part. The list is not intended to be exclusive.

(1) In any case in which an operator may be considered a successor operator, as determined in accordance with § 725.492, any employment with a prior operator shall also be deemed to be employment with the successor operator. In a case in which the miner was not independently employed by the successor operator, the prior operator shall remain primarily liable for the payment of any benefits based on the miner's employment with the prior operator. In a case in which the miner was independently employed by the successor operator after the transaction giving rise to successor operator liability, the successor operator shall be primarily liable for the payment of any benefits.

(2) In any case in which the operator which directed, controlled or supervised the miner is no longer in business and such operator was a subsidiary of a parent company, a member of a joint venture, a partner in a partnership, or was substantially owned or controlled by another business entity, such parent entity or other member of a joint venture or partner or controlling business entity may be considered the employer of any employees of such operator.

(3) In any claim in which the operator which directed, controlled or supervised the miner is a lessee, the lessee shall be considered primarily liable for the claim. The liability of the lessor may be established only after it has been determined that the lessee is unable to provide for the payment of benefits to a successful claimant. In any case involving the liability of a lessor for a claim arising out of employment with a lessee, any determination of lessor liability shall be made on the basis of the facts present in the case in accordance with the following considerations:

(i) Where a coal mine is leased, and the lease empowers the lessor to make decisions with respect to the terms and conditions under which coal is to be extracted or prepared, such as, but not limited to, the manner of extraction or preparation or the amount of coal to be produced, the lessor shall be considered the employer of any employees of the lessee.

(ii) Where a coal mine is leased to a self-employed operator, the lessor shall be considered the employer of such self-employed operator and its employees if the lease or agreement is executed or renewed after August 18, 1978 and such lease or agreement does not require the lessee to guarantee the payment of benefits which may be required under this part and part 726 of this subchapter.

(iii) Where a lessor previously operated a coal mine, it may be considered an operator with respect to employees of any lessee of such mine, particularly where the leasing arrangement was executed or renewed after August 18, 1978 and does not require the lessee to secure benefits provided by the Act.

(4) A self-employed operator, depending upon the facts of the case, may be considered an employee of any other operator, person, or business entity which substantially controls, supervises, or is financially responsible for the activities of the self-employed operator.

§ 725.494 Potentially liable operators.

An operator may be considered a "potentially liable operator" with respect to a claim for benefits under this part