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Virginia Now Equipped with Best Technology in Mine Rescue *The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy's Mine Rescue Team's New Equipment to Reduce Response Time*

Big Stone Gap, Va. – Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy's (DMME) mine rescue team is now equipped with state of the art communication and mobile equipment. The new equipment will reduce response time and be available to any mine rescue team that responds to an emergency in the Commonwealth.

DMME started the first state mine rescue team in March 2016. The team serves as backup emergency responders to company mine rescue teams in the state. "After staffing our team with some of coal industry's best and most experienced emergency responders, we decided we needed to get out front in mine rescue," said Virginia Mine Chief Randy Moore. "This equipment is some of the best out there right now and we wanted to make sure it was available to any mine rescue team that responds should an emergency happen. We work with every team in the Commonwealth and in neighboring states, as well."

A grant from the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) allowed DMME to purchase an IWT communications system. The wireless technology reaches up to six miles underground and can perform numerous tasks. Through a hand-held device, rescuers can talk to the command center. The device also sends information about the rescuer's location and air quality. It can map the area underground which can be transmitted back to the command center, as well. The information helps emergency responders make decisions faster. Before this technology was available, rescuers would have to take the time to rebuild underground communication systems that could easily be destroyed by emergency incidents. The system is the same MSHA uses and can be used together when both agencies respond to emergencies.

To establish a mobile command center, the first of its kind underground, DMME purchased a rescue ride (R-2). The ride holds the equipment needed to treat miners that may be injured and keep the lines of communication open. DMME set up the equipment to allow the fiber optic cable

to be continuously spooled from R-2 without disrupting communication as the mine rescue team moves further into the mine thus saving valuable response time. R-2 is specially designed to be driven in an underground coal mine. It is permissible, meaning anything on the equipment that may cause a spark is contained in a metal box. R-2 is also used to bring miners to the surface.

The communication system and R-2 can be useful in non-coal mining related emergencies, as well. “We are willing to answer whatever call we may get,” added Moore. “Other state agencies that respond to emergencies are aware of our capabilities and we want to respond and lend a hand whenever and wherever we are needed.”

DMME’s mine rescue team trains throughout the year, visiting mines and participating in competitions with company and other state teams. The team is required to complete a minimum of 48 hours of training. In addition to coal mines, DMME will also make the team available for Virginia’s mineral mines should assistance be needed.

The team includes: Chris Whitt, Trainer; Ken Johnson, Assistant Trainer; Anthony Sturgill, Captain; Andy Sawyers, Tail Captain; Danny Mullins, Gas Man; Sidney Crabtree, Map Man; Spencer Lee, Stretcher Man; Vernon Johnson, Jr., Briefing Officer and Rusty Ward, Command Center. All are within DMME’s mine safety group. Willie Cochran and Bentley Smith from DMME’s mineral mining group serve as support.

Learn more about the DMME mine rescue team’s new equipment on [DMME’s YouTube Channel](#).

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