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# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Virginia to Establish First State Mine Rescue Team**

*Team Staffed by the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy*

**Big Stone Gap, Va.** - The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) is now providing mine rescue services to the Commonwealth. The DMME team will serve as backup emergency responders to company mine rescue teams at every coal mine site in the state. This is the first state operated mine rescue team to be created in Virginia's history.

"Worker safety and a productive economy are top priorities for DMME," said DMME Director John Warren. "This team serves both. We have a very experienced group of mine inspectors, technical specialists and emergency managers that stepped up to provide this service for the miners of Virginia in a difficult time for the coal industry."

The creation of a state team meets federal requirements for two mine rescue teams at each mine site. Adding DMME's team as the back-up to the company teams will increase safety and emergency response time. Virginia's team also relieves the economic burden for the operators to establish the second team.

In addition to all the coal mines in southwest Virginia, DMME will also make the team available for mineral mines should the assistance be needed. It will respond to mine accidents and hazards and complete rescue and recovery operations in such scenarios as fires, roof collapses and flooding.

"We are already receiving positive feedback from the industry about the agency's decision to start the mine rescue team," said DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert. "Our team will be working directly with company teams and companies have opened and staffed their mine rescue stations for our team to get some of the initial training they need under their belts."

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DMME's mine rescue team trains throughout the year, visiting every mine and participating in competitions with company and other state teams. The team is required to complete a minimum of 48 hours of training.

The DMME mine rescue team is funded by a grant from the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). Federal grant dollars also purchased an emergency response vehicle and communication equipment designed by Innovative Wireless Technology that will synchronize with MSHA's emergency response system. The vehicle is also capable of providing video signals from the mine site to a protected web address in order to talk to experts back at the office or to view things, such as mine maps, simultaneously.

The team includes: Chris Whitt, Captain; Ken Johnson, Co-Captain; Anthony Sturgill and Danny Mullins, Gas Men; Sidney Crabtree, Map Man; and Rusty Ward, Briefing Officer. All are within DMME's mine safety group. Willie Cochran and Bentley Smith from DMME's mineral group will serve as support.

Learn more about the team from DMME's Mine Rescue video on [DMME's YouTube channel](#).

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