

News from the

**U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



For Immediate Release

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Wednesday February 15, 2006

***ENZI HOPES TO JUMP START DEVELOPMENT OF NEW MINE
SAFETY TECHNOLOGIES; SAVE LIVES IN COAL INDUSTRY***

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R- WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee) said today he hopes to “jump start a strong and essential working relationship” between federal mine safety experts and agencies tasked with developing first responder technologies to help improve mine safety and prevent the loss of more lives in the coal mining industry.

“While the investigation of the recent mine tragedies in West Virginia is not yet complete, these disasters have already made amply clear that certain areas in workplace safety demand our immediate attention. None is more important than the role of technology in making our mines safer,” Enzi said Wednesday, following a Roundtable of the HELP Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety.

“Technology currently available does have certain limits, but I am hopeful that we can find the innovation and advances necessary to develop lifesaving communications systems for all our mines,” he added. “Today’s Roundtable is one more step forward in translating our concern for mine workers into action.”

Enzi is now working with the Subcommittee’s Chairman, Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and other HELP Committee members to develop mine safety legislation in

response to the West Virginia tragedies last month. In addition, the HELP Committee also will hold a March 2nd oversight hearing on mine safety.

Enzi said he is optimistic that fully capable, wireless two-way phone communications and two-way text messaging hold promise for new applications in mine new safety equipment. Another priority must be to develop portable oxygen devices that contain enough oxygen to sustain miners and rescue teams long enough to reach safety following an accident.

Witnesses at today's Roundtable highlighted technologies pioneered by Australian and Canadian companies that allow first responders to send text messages deep underground and track from the surface the progress miners have made to either escape the mine or reach areas with a safe air supplies. They also have created mine refuge systems, or safe rooms, capable of sustaining life for up to 36 hours.

"Our own tragic incidents have spurred technology and innovation in the past. Since the tragic events of 9-11, we have all witnessed the significant strides being made in technology for first responders and for terrorist threats," Enzi said.

"My hope is that today's Roundtable will jumpstart a strong and essential working relationship between our federal mine safety experts and other federal agencies that maintain safety innovation programs such as the Department of Defense, NASA, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health at the Center for Disease Control."

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