

**PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA**

NEWS RELEASE

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Commissioners Clark, Wefald, and Cramer

For Immediate Release*

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Abandoned Mine Lands Division wins national award

After 23 years of stabilizing underground coal mines with enough grout to nearly fill a couple Olympic-sized pools, the North Dakota Public Service Commission received national recognition for mine reclamation work in Garrison.

The PSC's Abandoned Mines Land Division won the Western Regional Award for environmental excellence from the Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining.

The division received the award for its Garrison Abandoned Mines Land project, which began in 1983. To date, the Garrison project included filling more than 100 dangerous voids caused by abandoned underground mining that was done from about 1912 to 1926.

According to the Interior Department's Office of Surface Mining, the PSC developed a detailed, persistent approach to locating, mapping and filling underground mines before they could create dangerous sinkholes. The federal agency described the project as a "proactive approach" that has resulted in safer conditions for ranchers, farmers, houses, city streets and modern highways located over abandoned mines.

Bill Dodd, an environmental scientist with the Abandoned Mines Land Division, accepted the award on behalf of the Public Service Commission at the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Program annual conference on Sept. 26 in Billings, Mont. PSC Commissioner Susan Wefald and Bruce Beechie, an environmental scientist with the division, also attended the conference.

"This award signifies the hard work and dedication staff in the division has put into this project," Wefald said. "It's nice to know they have been recognized for their work on such an important project."

Dodd said the award is special because it's the first time the division has won it.

"This is the first time our division has won a prestigious national award like this one and we are really excited about it," Dodd said. "It was a team effort and I was proud to be part of the team."

The principal reclamation technique used in the project was pressurized grout remote backfilling. In this technique, a cementitious grout was pumped under pressure through holes drilled into the mine cavities to fill them and reduce the likelihood of

collapse. Approximately 4,800 cubic yards, or about 16.8 million pounds of grout was pumped beneath homes, streets and highways in the Garrison area.

“It’s good to fill these holes because they can collapse suddenly and can cause real problems for citizens who live in areas with abandoned underground mines,” Commissioner Kevin Cramer said.

Several test holes were drilled in order to find the abandoned mines. The holes were drilled between 30 feet and 70 feet deep. The construction costs for the project were about \$742,000.

The Abandoned Mines Land Division is 100-percent federally funded. Its mission is to eliminate potential or existing hazards associated with abandoned coal mines in North Dakota for which there is no continuing liability under state or federal law.

“The PSC’s Abandoned Mines Land Division doesn’t often make headlines, but the duties it has are vital to protecting communities that are virtually on top of potential hazards,” Commissioner Tony Clark said.

For more information about the PSC’s Abandoned Mines Land Division log onto www.psc.state.nd.us/ or call 328-2400. A more detailed explanation of the project can be found at www.psc.state.nd.us/jurisdiction/aml/completed-projects/2006-abandoned-mine-land-award-nomination.pdf.

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